

Learning to Honor
Exodus 20:1-2, Exodus 20:12
2/14/21
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Good morning, CPC. I'm so glad you were able to join us on this Valentine's Day, and I hope that you are able to enjoy being again together with family at home. It seems that ever since we've tried to go back in person, the weather is not agreeing with us. But I hope you're staying safe and are able to enjoy the time together with family.

This morning we continue in this series as we look at God's law, the moral law, and the Ten Commandments as we consider what did renewal in the wilderness look like for Israel? We see God's moral framework for the way in which He wanted to relate to them and how He wanted them to relate to Him, and then ultimately what that was to look like in their relationships with one another. This is what we're learning from God's work as we seek to apply it in our present-day circumstances.

This morning, we make the shift from the first four commandments which primarily look at our relationship with the Lord our God. Now, we turn to this second part of the Ten Commandments that looks at what our relationships ought to reflect with each other. This morning, we look at the fifth commandment. We will begin looking at Exodus 20, as has been our practice as we began this series, by looking first at verses 1 through 2, how God grounds His commands as He grounds the responsibility He's giving to His people in the fact that He is the redeemer God.

Hear now God's word, Exodus 20:1-2 and then verse 12.

And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Pray with me.

Our heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise for this day that you have reminded us again of your faithfulness, of your provision, of your love, of your redemption. We gather together as your people to hear your word. We ask that your word would feed us, shape us, strengthen us, but ultimately, Lord, that it would ground us in who you are, for you have spoken and reminded us again that as a God of redemption, you have for us a plan, a way to live that enables us to flourish. Help us to do that, O Lord, to the glory of your name. It is in Jesus's name that we pray. Amen.

The story of being a parent right now is a story that is full of examples of just how challenging being a parent is. Over this last year, we've been reminded that in the midst of this pandemic, many parents have had to learn what it looks like to balance working from home or having to commute to work while at the same time making sure your children are receiving an education which is only available through technology. What does it look like for a struggling parent who is single and trying to raise their children but at the same time trying to provide for themselves in the midst of a global pandemic? And as those of you who are pregnant and who have given birth during this time know, it is incredibly hard learning to be a parent in the midst of all of this. The stories of being a parent are full of challenge, but also delight.

This passage draws its attention to what our obligations are to our parents in the light of who God is. What does it mean for a child to relate to their parents? It is not an easy topic, but it is one which is necessary for us as a people to wrestle with as God calls us to. But it isn't merely to children who are under the age of 18. There is also plenty here that is for those of us who are adults and have our own

families but also still have our parents living. What are our obligations? What does God's word have to say to us for this day?

This morning as we consider these words from Moses as he received them from the Lord, we learn that God tells His people to "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." This is the first command that has tied with it a promise. It is important for us to hear it.

First, before I even tell you where we're headed, it's important for us to understand what does the word here mean by honor? Let's unpack that for just a moment. To say that we honor something is a Hebrew word meaning literally "glory" and "weight." To honor someone is to give them the respect that is due to their position, to the weight of their position. And the position of a parent carries with it great weight. It is full of challenge. It is one that is important for us to acknowledge that God has set in place that the role of a parent is one that is important and carries with it great challenge, but also great importance. When it says here to "Honor your father and your mother," it's saying to have a level of respect that is due to them because of their position.

This morning's outline follows then that if we're called to honor our fathers and our mothers, what is required? What is required is first humility, secondly, wisdom, and then thirdly, living the promise. Honoring our fathers and mothers requires humility, requires wisdom, and that we might live the promise.

Let's look together first at this requires humility. What do I mean? What I mean is this. Fundamentally, to honor someone and their position that they have that is honorific, that is worthy of weight and glory means that I functionally understand that now I am no longer the center of my own existence. It requires humility for me to now see that I need to make room for another and for others. I am no longer simply the center of all of my energy and focus and priority. But what is required for us is humility that seeks to move us to see that now we have a responsibility in relationship to and for whom those who are in our lives that have authority, that have shaping power. And what it means is that we're called to show respect, of course.

Fundamentally, this is germane to all of scripture. Ultimately, we see that there is wisdom to God's word as He tells us how to live, and we see the fulfillment of God's righteousness not only in how He as a heavenly Father has related to us, but we also see that built into God's redemptive work is ultimately the revelation of His Son who honored Him as heavenly Father. More than that, as an outworking of the gospel as God has loved us in Jesus Christ, it is Christ who teaches us and gives us the grace and the motivation of how we ought to live in humility with those around us, honoring and respecting others. We hear this from the apostle Paul as he says in his letter to the Philippians in 2:1,

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing for rivalry or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [ESV]

Built into this gospel of grace is a changed way of how we relate to others. And, yes, it has a proper priority to it. And for the Lord to tell us how we are to honor our fathers and our mothers, built into that is to show the priority of the relationship that we have with our parents. And so we seek to treat them and to recognize and to honor them as greater than us, worthy of honor and love and respect.

Of course, this is a challenge, particularly in our day and age, but not just in this day and age. It's been a challenge for the last 50 and even 60 years. Even as I was a teenager, I was well aware that in the 1980's, most of the films in popular culture showed parents in one of two ways. They either showed parents as completely gullible and buffoons, or they showed them as domineering and controlling. Rarely

were parents displayed as they often are: loving, sacrificial, caring, and therefore worthy of our honor and respect. What was often triumphed and celebrated, and still to this day, is to have this prideful dismissiveness towards parents. Oh, they don't know what they're talking about. Oh, they're completely out of touch. And even if our parents are not in step with all that is happening in the world, it is never a reason to dismiss them. Just the opposite. What we see is that because God is a God of redemption, He's demonstrating how He wants His people to be changed in their relationship with each other, that because He has redeemed us and drawn us to Himself in His love and grace as a heavenly Father, He then teaches us how we ought to treat our heavenly fathers and mothers.

What does this look like practically? Let me just give a couple of suggestions. First, I think it's recognizing the priority that mothers and fathers play in our lives because this relationship matters because they are the ones who have brought us into the world. It has priority. It doesn't have the same priority throughout the whole of our lives because as we grow up to be adults, or if we become married and we have husbands and wives and those relationships have priority, it is right that those relationships have great priority, even greater priority. And yet it doesn't mean that our relationship with our parents falls off the priority list. In fact, just the opposite. As long as they are our parents, we seek to honor them because of the priority of their place.

Secondly, I believe it requires humility when honoring our parents because it requires not just priority but listening, to care enough for them to listen to them. This is perhaps the greatest place of challenge. Oftentimes, we don't want to listen to our parents because we think we know better, or we know what they're going to say, or we think we know what they're going to say, or we don't want them to repeat something because we know that they know us. Perhaps the greatest amount of humility that is needed from the Lord is our ability to simply care enough for our parents by listening to them.

Thirdly, not just priority, not just listening, but also allowing them to have influence and shaping in our lives. Do we look to them as an example? Do we recognize that they do have shaping power? Asking them for advice to allow them to have influence requires humility, and it is hard.

Fourthly, and I think particularly, it requires humility in honoring our fathers and mothers because I believe that it requires we cultivate the self-discipline to avoid sarcasm, to avoid dismissiveness, to avoid hostility, manipulation, or criticism. You see, they know us, but we also know them. Oftentimes, familiarity does in fact breed contempt. It requires humility enabled by God's grace, knowing who are we that God would shed His love on us? Who are we that Christ, while we were yet sinners, died for us? We see what He has done for us. Therefore, as a result, we seek by His grace and Spirit to cultivate the self-discipline to avoid sarcasm, dismissiveness, manipulation, and hostility.

It is hard. I know this is hard. I spent much of my first 16 years of life dismissing my parents. In my mind, in my heart, and even in my speech, I would deride them. I would make fun of them. The last thing I wanted to do was listen to them. But I remember the day when I became a Christian and how and in what ways my relationship with my parents completely changed. It wasn't perfect, but it completely changed. I began to see how much of my speech was dripping with contempt or sarcasm, how much I had just dismissed them. But I also saw how much I had missed. Thanks be to God, what I have experienced in my relationship with them since that day of knowing Christ, even now as an adult, although the relationship has changed appropriately so, I would not exchange that relationship for anything. It is only because God's grace can redeem and remake.

But I know that pressing in on this point, we have to acknowledge that our parent's relationships with their children are far from perfect. It is far from perfect. Parents sin against their children. They abuse their authority, and they hurt, and they leave scars emotionally and physically. I can't deal with all of those issues in one sermon, but those are important. Please hear me say that honoring our fathers and mothers does not remove their responsibility. This word is spoken to us as those who are children and have our parents. It requires humility.

Secondly, honoring our fathers and mothers requires wisdom. How does it require wisdom? I

believe it requires wisdom because of what I just said. First, to be able to honor our fathers and mothers in the way that God has intended for us to show them respect, to give them priority, to listen, to make room for them requires wisdom because we as children understand that we are sinful and fallen people. Our parents are sinful and fallen people. Therefore, that relationship, the parent and child relationship, is a complex one. It requires wisdom then by God's grace and from His word. How do I as a sinful fallen person move towards another and show them respect, recognizing their failures? That requires wisdom.

It is wisdom that reminds us that as we have backstories, so do our parents. It requires wisdom to understand and to remember that our parents are human, too. And they don't always get it right, nor do we. It is precisely that wisdom undergirded by humility that enables us to move towards our parents in their frailty and in their brokenness and we in our brokenness in a way that seeks to cultivate a healthy relationship. That is guided by wisdom.

Another aspect of this honoring of our fathers and mothers requiring wisdom is yet again a point where there's often the most conflict, but it is a reality that the scriptures tell us, particularly in the Proverbs. It often says as the psalmist speaks to his son, "Son, listen to me," he's calling out, and then he describes wisdom as that which should be sought after. Here is a pearl of wisdom. It requires wisdom to honor our fathers and mothers because it requires that we remember that they have experienced life more than we have, and they know more than we do, not in everything but in many things. It requires wisdom and discernment to remember that. As such, if we ask for wisdom and we honor our fathers and mothers by asking them for advice, we are then seeking wisdom. God says that he who lacks wisdom, let him ask for it, and we will receive it, and it becomes like gold on our pockets.

And I am grateful not just for the wisdom my own birth parents have given to me but also my spiritual parents, the fathers and mothers in the faith who have given me wisdom throughout the years. And even to this day, this requires wisdom. I believe to live out that wisdom in honoring our fathers and our mothers, it requires an attitude of curiosity, to be open to what they can teach us and what we can learn.

Secondly, I think that we can practice generosity and using wisdom to say that because my parents are human and because they have backstories, they have good days, they have bad days, they're weighed down with burdens, I can practice the discipline of generosity, of seeking to encourage them to remind them that we love them, to remind them that we're grateful for them, and to pray for them. We want that from our parents. But we can ask that God will give us wisdom to practice that generosity towards them.

But, also, I believe it requires we practice empathy. Our parents know trouble and challenge and difficulty and burden that they often never share with their children. And it requires of us wisdom to know how to practice empathy of giving space to our parents knowing that they are struggling, knowing that they're burdened. May God give us the ability and wisdom to remember that and not expect them to always serve us when we want it, how we want it, where we want it, but to know they, too, need us to care for them.

And I think that's where we enter into the promise that is attached to this command. It says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord God is giving you." Here, while I have addressed the issue of parent and child, particularly thinking of younger children, now we need to broaden the lens, if you will, to understand that this has a much greater target than merely young children to their parents. Yes, there is plenty here implied and explicit for how we ought to obey our parents, listen to our parents, honor our parents, and that is all right and good. But what happens here is we consider this promise. It's interesting that the promise begins to help us see a fuller application of the command itself.

When it says that "your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you," it's actually not talking to the individual or giving us the expectation that we'll live long lives with many years. No. There's something else going on here. Many commentators have pointed to this, and it's here that what God is saying to Israel as a people as He is to now His church of Jesus Christ is that I've made

you a people that I have called my own, and I desire that you live abundantly. This idea that you may live long in the land has embedded within it this same idea of shalom. It's not just merely peace as in the absence of conflict, but rather abundant life, a full life as it ought to be lived.

What is being talked about here is not longevity, but a fullness of life. In some sense, what He's giving them a vision for is I am about to give you a land. So He's telling Israel to look into the future, and He's saying, do you see where I'm taking you? And here's how I want you to live, not just in relationship with me. You shall have no other gods before you, and this is how you are to worship me. But this is how I want you to live with each other. And He's saying something to the community, not just to the personal relationship between parent and child, but actually our relationship intergenerationally which is why we as a church want to continue to flourish as a congregation that is intergenerational. It's not just that I seek to honor my birth father and mother, but I seek to honor those brothers and fathers and mothers who are older than I am. And I've had the blessing of serving with men and their wives in ministry who are well beyond my years. And we seek to honor them.

There's something deeper here as if living long in the land is pointing towards this flourishing, this thriving and what it means for God to provide a place and a city, a culture for His people. It is a promise that He wants us to see the vision that our ethical behavior towards each other will bring about, that if we seek to honor them, it will bring about a fruitful abundant life. Said this way, that respecting and honoring our fathers and mothers in the faith, in the church, and in our families, we have a concern and care for them in such a way that that concern and care, that honor and respect is like a glue that holds together the whole community when it's lived out, when it's modeled, because without it, what we're left with is chaos and insecurity. Those who have gone before us who are older than us, if we're not caring for them, it creates an insecure environment for them, and they don't flourish.

If we do not model that for our children, we're teaching them how to treat us. And so it begins to have a beautiful cycle of us honoring our fathers and mothers in the faith and in our families, and we're also modeling that for our children. In so doing, we're creating an environment that has a glue of relational ethical behavior that God says will bring about our flourishing.

This is a beautiful and gorgeous picture. I am grateful that we have an intergenerational church that enables us to show that faith can be lived out many years and what it looks like, and we seek to honor and care for them. This is why we care for our widows and our widowers. This is why we seek to honor those who are ahead of us in the faith and seek to make sure and procure justice and care and concern for them, grounded in what God has done for us.

What is being talked about here is, yes, absolutely our individual relationships with our fathers and mothers in our families, but also in the family of God, the church of Jesus Christ. It is grounded in the reality that this is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, that while we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us. Therefore, saved by grace, lived by grace, we seek to honor our fathers and mothers with that grace. What comes out of it is a beautiful picture of God's community in the world for the glory of His name.

This is hard. There are lots of questions that come from it. When our parents fail us, when our parents do not want us to care for them, and also the very painful reality when our fundamental relationship with our parents is often broken, those are real issues, and there is real pain. But the gospel can help address those issues, and we need to do that together.

For the purposes of looking at God's word this morning, I want us to be reminded of what God intends here for His people, for His church, that it would be a model to the world that we do not dismiss the generations that are ahead of us so that we can model for the generations that come behind us of how we ought to live and honor one another. But it is only by His grace. It is only by His redeeming power. It is only by His wisdom that teaches us humility. It is only by the wisdom and humility evidenced to us and shown to us in Christ that we're able to move towards them in humility and wisdom.

May the Lord do this in us for the glory of His name and for the building up of His church. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your word. We thank you this morning that you remind us of the beautiful picture of what you want for your church, for your people. Help us to love and honor and respect our parents. It isn't just about obedience. It is about a full-orbed relationship. Lord, help us to live that out with humility and wisdom so that we might live out the promise of what it looks like to flourish as a people, as an intergenerational people who need one another that we might reflect your peace, your grace, and your mercy. Thank you, Lord Jesus. It is in His name we pray. Amen.