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Living Life Together by Joyful Obedience to Our Covenant

- What is the church of Jesus Christ in America's role during the turbulent times in which we are living?...
- everybody who pays any attention to culture at all agrees that there are amazing events unfolding around our world, our country, our state, and even our community right now...
- if there was ever a need for people like... **1 Chronicles 12:32 - And of the children of Issachar, who were men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...**
 - the need is now for sure...
 - we should be asking God to give us as individuals and as a church the same request made by young King Solomon...an understanding heart...God answered that desire by the way, and was greatly honored by it...
 - **1 Kings 4:29 - Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore.**
- why is that so important today?...
 - governments are toppling at an amazing rate right now...Egypt, Tunisia, perhaps Libya...
 - Iran is sending warships through the Suez Canal...
 - no one would have predicted any of that even 6 months ago...
 - that conversation could go a thousand different ways...but I'm asking – does the church of Jesus Christ in this country have any role in that...and have we positioned ourselves well to fulfill that role?...
 - what about events within our borders?...
 - a number of state senators in WI flee the state...not because Purdue whipped them in basketball the week before last (just prior to soundly defeating Ohio State, the favored team of our own Pastor Green)...
 - these state senators fled the state so their legislature could not debate their new governor's proposal to avoid a historic budgetary crisis...
 - one culture leader in WI referred to their governor as "Mubarak of the Midwest"...a reference to the recently ousted leader of Egypt...
 - so what does the church look like in the middle of all of that?...we had all kinds of people at our BCTC 2 weeks ago from WI...they were here for ministry training...what is the role of the church in all of that?...
 - then there's our own state...where there are a series of education reforms being proposed that could impact the way public funds are dispersed for education in Indiana...
 - and I'm very glad our legislators are talking about important issues – make no mistake about that...
 - and as a private individual, I have some opinions about all of that and you probably do too...
 - but I'm asking you about the role of the church...especially since some of that could actually help our own Christian school...but according to some...might have a negative impact on public education...
 - I'm asking – what is the church's role in the turbulent times in which we're living...and are we well positioned to fulfill that role?
- I believe we can find several very important answers to that question...at the foot of a mountain...

- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Exodus 19 (page 55 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you)...
- our theme this year is **Living Life Together**...and when this discussion is done this morning...we'll actually be in a passage in the NT that alludes to Exodus 19 and explains how God is building us up as a spiritual house...
- that's a great way to think about the church...as a group of people God is building up as a spiritual house...
 - but the questions are how, and why is He doing that...
 - these verses answer those questions in ways that are breathtakingly relevant to what we are facing in our culture and our world today...
- let me just say a word about where we are in this series...today and next Sunday are our last two weeks in the book of Exodus...then we'll begin a 7 week outreach series entitled fried request...we'll say more about that next week...
- but right now we're circling the landing strip of our study in Exodus...so last week we examined the miracle of the manna...an event that clearly pointed to the coming of our Messiah who offered Himself as our Bread of Life...
 - we encouraged one another to take a look at our spiritual diets...
 - are we truly learning what it means to find our joy and our satisfaction and our sustenance in a daily walk with our Savior?...or are we spoiling our appetite with the potato chips of worry, or anger, material possessions, or worship of any number of false gods?...
- now our study brings us to the foot of the mountain...where God gives His people something that is often lacking in the "antinomian American church"...antinomian is from the Greek word nomos – law – antinomian means "without law" – no place for law, or obedience...
 - a failure to understand and appreciate that topic from a biblical perspective is why the church so frequently misses opportunities to fulfill our role in culture...
 - let's get at it...
 - read Exodus 19-20...
- we're talking this morning about **Living Life Together in Joyful Obedience to Our Covenant**...
- with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 principles to help us fulfill our role in culture**.
- I. Understand the Covenantal Nature of Our Relationship with God.**
 - we believe in interpreting the Bible in the context in which it was given...
 - that's why Sunday after Sunday we start with the Scripture and what it would have meant to the original audience...and then and only then do we try to move out and apply it to where we're living today...
 - that's called exegesis – leading the meaning out of a passage of Scripture...using the grammatical historical method of Bible interpretation...
 - otherwise you end up proof-texting --- starting with some point you're trying to make and then finding a verse – often taken out of context – to prove your point (and that's the key idea there – you're starting with your point, instead of God's point – that's really bad idea...)
 - it's also called eisegesis – putting a meaning in the text so you can take it out...
 - so we always first ask – how would these verses been received and interpreted by the original audience?....

- and there's no question about this text...the ten commandments were given in the form of a covenant...a template that was used frequently in the ancient world when an agreement was made between a king and his servants...
- the formal term is Hittite Suzerain Vassal Treaty...there will be a quiz on that later...but here's the point...

A. God communicates to His people in forms and images that are easily understood.

"Thus far in Exodus, the relationship between God and Israel had been wholly one-sided, with Israel being the passive beneficiary of God's active role in history. It was God who took the initiative in sending Moses to the pharaoh, who coerced the tyrant by way of the plagues to liberate Israel, who performed the wonders at the sea, and who supplied the Israelites physical needs in the wilderness. Now a new phase in Israel's history is about to commence. God's redemptive acts on Israel's behalf require a reciprocal response on the part of Israel. The liberated multitude of slaves must be united not only by a vital sense of shared tragedy and a common experience of emancipation, but even more by bonds of perceived ideals--a vision of a new order of life, namely, the establishment of an essentially different kind of society from what had hitherto existed. The precondition for the fulfillment of this goal, indeed its instrumentality is to be the forging of a special relationship between God and Israel. This relationship is to be sealed by a covenant, which would establish Israel as God's "treasured possession," as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Nahum Sama, Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel, p. 130).

- see, sealed by a covenant...everyone would have recognized the way these events unfolded as being that...it was time for them to come to an understanding of what was expected...
- now what can we learn from the way this is recorded in God's Word?...

B. God's commands are preceded by divine mercy, provision, and protection.

- **Exodus 19:4 - You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.**
- that's the kind of king you want...one who would metaphorically "bear us up on His own wings..."
- that same theme is captured in - Deuteronomy 32:11 - Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,
- and here's the point – if a God like that has commands for you to follow – you can be sure that obeying those commands will never steer you wrong...
- that's why the NT would say... **1 John 5:3 - For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.**
- the Lord chose to demonstrate His goodness first so that it was easier for His children to trust His and obey His commands...

C. God's commands are the logical extension of His ownership.

- **Exodus 19:5 - Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;**
- that's part and parcel of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ...understanding that he is our sovereign king – the Lord – the one who is in charge of our lives and our very existence...
- **Ephesians 1:11-12 - also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel**

of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

- the more we recognize God as a good king, the more amazed we are to be named as His possession, and the more willing we are to follow His commands...

D. Joyful obedience is central to our God-given purpose.

- Exodus 19:6 is central to everything we are studying in this series...

- Exodus 19:6 - and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.

- please think about that...a kingdom of priests...people who are a blessing to the world by representing Him well...with lives that are growing in holiness...that actually want to obey His commands because of love for Him...
- now, there's a lot more to say about that – but please tie that back to the introduction...
 - people around the world are clamoring for freedom...and insisting on freedom...and that can be a very good thing...and if this country has gotten anything right, it's that...
 - and we should be thankful and praise the Lord for men and women who have sacrificed and died for our freedom...and we have exemplified that to a watching world in ways that are incredibly powerful...Ronald Regan's famous quote...Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall...
 - what our country lacks is resultant holiness...the church has not been nearly as powerful and influential as we could have been...and that is reflected in part by the spiritual temperature of our culture...
 - and I'm not confusing the purposes of the church with the purposes of the state...I'm simply saying, in a country where such a significant percentage of the population claims to be followers of Christ...you would certainly expect a culture that was characterized by far more righteousness than ours...
 - and that would have had a significant impact on other nations that are looking to see what happens when people are free...
 - the excuse many extremist leaders give to discredit democracy is the wicked nature of the resultant culture...and on that point, there's some truth to the accusation...
- **Galatians 5:13 - For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**
 - the point is, had the American church done a better job of functioning as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation by joyful obeying the commands of God...we would be in a much better position to impact a world that is more open to worldview changes than has been true in a long, long, time...
- bring that down to our state --- I'm glad for legislators who are willing to take on tough issues...there are some very interesting things happening in Indianapolis right now when it comes to education reform, abortion laws, the sanctity of marriage...
- and we should pray for our legislators...and be involved in all sorts of ways as individuals...
- but when it comes to us as a church...we are given the wonderful privilege of being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation – we'll see NT confirmation of that in a few minutes...
 - that's why we should be quietly trying to educate our children, in whatever option we have chosen, in a way that results in joyful obedience to the commands of God...

- and that's why we should be more concerned about making our own marriages what they ought to be before criticizing someone else's definition of marriage...
- and while of course we should be horrified by abortion because of the loss of a baby's life – we should also be sure we're raising our own children in the nurture and admonition of Christ...
- judgment begins at the household of God...our calling is to be a kingdom of priests, not a kingdom of critics...
- personal righteousness is a far more effective witnessing tool than self-righteousness will ever be...
- now I realize you might say – but PV, you keep saying that this passage was given in the form of a OT covenant—how do we know that?...time doesn't allow us to develop this as much as we could...but here's the quick fly by...
- these treaties in the ancient world had a similar formula...

E. The 10 commandments were given in the typical form of an agreement between a king and his servants.

A. Preamble

Exodus 20:1-2a - Then God spoke all these words, saying, I am the LORD your God...

B. Historical prologue

Exodus 20:2b - ...who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

C. Stipulations

Exodus 20:3-17

- in this case, the actual 10 commandments along with the other laws explained later in the text...

D. Witness and deposit of the text.

- what's beautiful about this part of the story is that God's law was to be kept under the...
- **Exodus 25:21 - "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.**
- already pointing to the fact that God knew His people would never be able to keep these laws on their own...and therefore complete obedience was never the criteria for a personal relationship with Him (we'll say more about that in a minute...)

E. Curses and blessings.

Deuteronomy 28:1-4, 12 - Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God...

- so what's the point? – this information was given in a form that God's people clearly got the point...This God who has demonstrated His power and His goodness...is going to make it possible for us to live in a way that is entirely different than any other nation...our relationship with Him is a covenant...it's a promise...these are commands that in keeping them, will make us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...an incredibly bright light to those the Lord places around us...

- now, 2 other ideas at this point...

F. Obeying the 10 commandments is a response of love for our God who first loved us.

- you may remember that Jesus explained this in the NT when He was asked what was the greatest commandment...

- **Matthew 22:36-40** - One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a *question*, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' " **"This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'**"

- that's one of the ways you become a kingdom of priests—understanding that this is all about love...

1. Loving God.

1) You shall have no other gods before me – 20:3

2) Do not make idols – 20:4-6

3) Do not take the name of the Lord in vain – 20:7

4) Keep the Sabbath day – 20:8-11

- the only command not repeated in the NT...

- also a great demonstration that creation was in six literal days

2. Loving others.

5) Honor your father and mother – 20:12

6) Do not murder – 20:13

7) Do not commit adultery – 20:14

8) Do not steal – 20:15

9) Do not lie – 20:16

10) Do not covet – 20:17

- one other key emphasis here...

G. Obedience is the appropriate response for people who properly fear God.

- there's no question that God orchestrates these events in a way that would cause men and women to treat these matters with utmost reverence...

- **Proverbs 1:7** - **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

- now I realize that's a lot of content – and honestly—we have quite a bit more to cover...

- but let me just stop and ask you this?...is there evidence in your life that you understand your relationship with the Lord to be a covenant with ethical stipulations?...are you helping this church family be a kingdom of priests...a holy nation...is that really the way we're living life together?

- now if you say – I can't, on my own...that's not a bad place to be logically...

II. Let God's Law Quickly Drive Us to Our Redeemer.

- please always remember this – the law is never the end of the story...at any point in the history of God's people...

A. No one, at any time, was saved by keeping the law.

- cf. **Romans 4:1-5**

- **Romans 3:28** - **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

B. The law was intended to reveal our need of a Savior.

1. Galatians 3:24-25 - Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ*, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.
2. This was Jesus' point to the Rich Young Ruler
- cf. Matthew 19:16-22
3. This is why the giving of the law was closely followed by the institution of the sacrificial system.
- cf. the rest of the book of Exodus and the book of Leviticus
4. This is why the more we respect God's law, the more we love God's Son.
Romans 8:3-4 - For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as *an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- so where does that leave a person who knows Christ in relationship to the law?...
- great news...

C. Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

- Matthew 5:17 - Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.
- in what sense – helping us understand and appreciate not just the letter of the law, but the spirit of it...
- so it's not just that we don't murder, but we even try to avoid the murderous heart of sinful anger...
- it's not just that we don't commit adultery, but that we try to avoid the heart sin of lust...
- and if you say – but how does Jesus do that?...
- by understanding a subsequent covenant...
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 - Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

III. Strive to Contribute to Our Church Being Known for Joyful Obedience to the Commands of God.

A. As a way to demonstrate the genuineness of our salvation.

- 1 John 2:3 - By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

B. As a way of silently proclaiming the identity of our Master.

- Exodus 19:5 - Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;

There is a metaphor that the Bible uses to describe believers...It is a word picture we don't hear much about, yet it is absolutely critical for understanding what it means to follow Jesus. It is the image of a slave...

So why don't we hear about this concept in the American church today? The answer to this question is as simple as it is surprising. The Greek word for slave has been covered up by being mistranslated in almost every English version--going back to both the King James Version and the Geneva Bible that predated it. Though the word slave (*doulos* in Greek) appears 124 times in the original text, it is correctly translated only once in the King James. Most of our modern translations do only slightly better.

Instead of translating *doulos* as "slave," these translations consistently substitute the word servant in its place. Ironically, the Greek language has at least half a dozen words that can mean servant. The word *doulos* is not one of them. Whenever it is used, both in the New Testament and in secular Greek literature, it always and only means slave...

While it is true that the duties of slave and servant may overlap to some degree, there is a key distinction between the two: servants are hired; slaves are owned.

Servants have an element of freedom in choosing whom they work for and what they do. The idea of servanthood maintains some level of self-autonomy and personal rights. Slaves, on the other hand, have no freedom, autonomy, or rights.

In the Greco-Roman world, to be someone's slave was to be his possession, bound to obey his will without hesitation or argument...

For believers, the implications are clear. We were the slaves of sin. But when God rescued us, we became slaves to righteousness and slaves of Christ. We now belong wholly to Him. We are no longer our own. We are, as the apostle Paul says, a people for His own possession. And understanding all of this changes everything about us, starting with our perspective and our priorities.

True Christianity is not about adding Jesus to *my* life. Instead, it is about devoting myself completely to *Him*—submitting wholly to His will and seeking to please Him above all else. It demands dying to self and following the Master, no matter the cost. In other words, to be a Christian is to become Christ's slave.

C. As a way of fulfilling our God-given purpose.

1 Peter 2:5, 9-12 - You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now

you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.