

How are we? Let's go to Exodus 20. I want to chat about a couple of things for the next few weeks, so I guess you could call this the start of a new series. For the past year, we've planned on starting something this coming Easter that would last five weeks. And so we're only a few weeks to there. And so I didn't want to do Luke for three weeks and then go into another five week series and then come back to Luke. So the plan is for me to just chat with you about some things that are on my mind, and then we'll do a five week series starting on Easter Sunday. After that, we'll start Luke back up.

Before I became a pastor here at the Village, I just taught. That's what I did. I would travel around and teach. Itinerary is what they all it. I was an itinerant minister. So what I would do is mainly go into college campuses and teach. I would teach the gospel, I would teach biblical Christianity. And then I would fly out to different churches that would say, "Hey, come here and do five talks on this." And so I'd prep those talks and I'd go in and do them. And then there were certain things that I would do every week. Early on I was flying into Houston every Monday and then flying to Abilene on Tuesdays. Wednesday was kind of the Sabbath, my day off. And then we would fly off Thursday for whatever we were doing that weekend on Friday and Saturday. I'd preach Sunday morning at somewhere and wear my suit, the one I have. And then I'd fly home Sunday night and rest a little bit. There was in that time of living in that world, of going from church to church some real deep frustrations that began to be born in me that would actually lead to some bitterness in me. And it really revolved around two things that I continually saw. Now I want to be very upfront with you. What I saw might have been there and might not have been there. When you're only in town for three days, it's really hard to see. But I think rhetoric reveals what's really going on. In fact, the Bible even says that it's going to be out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. And so I started picking up on two types of rhetoric, and I think they're related, that made me very frustrated with church, made me very frustrated with Evangelicals and made me very frustrated to the point where I needed some help to get over it. It almost made me disqualify myself for this job. I didn't want the job because the thought of being in the Bible Belt with a bunch of Ned Flanderses was more than I could handle.

Here were the two things that I saw. First, it appeared that the gospel of Jesus Christ, the cross of Jesus Christ as centered for meritless salvation, the justification before God comes through the cross of Christ alone and by none of our own merit had been replaced by some sense of moral religion. So it made for a lot of really crazy sermons. I would sit and there would be a guy speaking, we would break and then I would be speaking. So I would listen to that guy speak, and he would say crazy things like, "Christians don't do this." And I would just go, "Who do you know? Who are you running with? Because I know a lot of Christians who do do that. And then I know a group that doesn't want to do that but still feel kind of owned by it and can't get out of it." That's just what it was. It was always just morality. It was just, "Do this and do that and do this..." And so it was very frustrating. And that was one of the things I saw. It just seemed like nobody would ever just say, "No, the cross is it. If you add to the cross, you're outside of biblical Christianity." In fact, rarely did I hear the cross mentioned. It was always something about doing, which in the end is works-based righteousness which the Bible condemns anytime it mentions it. And so that was the first frustration I had.

The second frustration I had. There seemed to be this pervasive attitude in Evangelicalism that you should bring your Bible but keep your problems to yourself. So bring your Bible and be a good person, but don't be a pain and don't be difficult. That's what it felt like. It felt like there was no plan for after conversion. It was like, "You believe in Christ? Great, now be quiet and look pretty." And I think they're related. I think one creates the other. Without the cross of Christ, you can boast in your moral accomplishments which creates churches that pretty much look like the Stepford

Wives where everybody's pretty and smiling and great. And if you've noticed in those types of churches, no one ever has small problems; everybody's house just burns down. Does that make sense? I'm saying nobody has an electrical problem with a switch. No one can ever be honest about, "Hey, this is supposed to turn that on and it's not turning that on." Instead, everybody just goes, "My house is on fire!!!" And so you don't ever hear anything until the marriage dissolves or somebody gets fired for embezzlement. Have you picked up on that? Nobody goes, "Uh, I've got a lust problem that's kind of continual." They're never like that. They're always beautiful, they teach Sunday school...adultery!!! Am I lying? I don't think I'm making this up. It's deacon, it's lead out in communion and then it's prison for 20 years for embezzlement. It's just like there's never any, "Hey, the switch isn't working;" there's always just, "My house just blew up." And so I grew very frustrated at both of these.

So here's the naïve, arrogant plan. Here's what we're going to do at Highland Village First Baptist, aka. the Village. We're going to fearlessly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, meritless salvation based on the cross of Christ alone. We're going to fearlessly teach it. And then we're going to do all that we can to be open and honest about where we are in the hopes that we can move into holiness and be a reflection of the goodness, grace and mercy of God to the DFW area. That was the plan. Only six years in, that has served to be much more difficult than I originally thought. I'll be honest with you. The larger we get as a church, the more people I owe an apology to. Because here's what I think. Here's what it feels like to me. It feels like we are constantly riding this pendulum back and forth between license and legalism. And so it's like you go, "Grace, Christ, the cross, meritless salvation" until the pendulum swings over here and just a big bulk of us starts going, "We do what we want, say what we want, go where we want and God loves us." And then I'm like, "No, no, no," and then all of a sudden we're like, "Don't go here, don't do this, you can't do that, don't watch that." And I'm like, "No, no, no." So we swing back over. It's like one or two weeks out of every year we get it, and we get it just for a second as it swings on over. So maybe this is just what we do as pastors. Maybe this is the game. I don't know. I'm 34 and this is the first I've done this. Maybe what we do our whole lives is go, "No no no. Yes yes yes. No no. Yes yes. No. Yes...." and just hope that maybe the pendulum will stop just long enough for us to be healthy. And so it's just turned into a big nightmare.

So here's what I thought we could do. I want to try to answer this question. What does God want for our lives in the fullness of Christ? What does He want? Maybe this is the question. What now? Okay, justification, cross of Christ, meritless salvation, right standing because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross alone, by grace you have been saved through faith and even the faith to believe is not of yourself so that no one would ever boast. Yes, but now what? What does it look like to actually do this? In order to do that, I think we have to look at an attribute of God that is very confusing. And so this is just set up for where we're going in the next few weeks. I want to talk about an attribute of God that doesn't get talked about enough. I want us to look at it, figure it out and know it, and then that will serve as a springboard for where we go in the next few weeks.

So let's look at this attribute found in Exodus 20. Starting in verse 1, "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." So God's defining the nature of our relationship as covenantal. This is the idea of being betrothed, married. He's saying, "I am your God. You are My people. We are betrothed, we are married. We belong to one another, and I have saved you, rescued you, delivered you from betrayal, sorrow and slavery. This is the nature of our relationship. I am God, you are Mine, I am yours and I have saved you from slavery." Let's keep reading, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them..." So here's what He just said. "We're in a covenant with one another. I am God, you are My people, we are betrothed to one another, so don't worship things that you can make with your hands and don't worship the creative order such as the sun, the wind or the ocean." He's going to attack this idea of worshipping other Gods throughout the whole Bible, including Paul a thousand years later is going to say

about Athens that it was easier to find a god than it was to find a man. They even had a temple to the unknown god in case this god showed up really angry going, "Why didn't you worship me?" They'd be like, "That one's you. You're the unknown god. Please don't destroy us." So it was a hyper-religious city. Each one of these gods had temples and temple attendants that took care of the god. So they fed the god, they bathed the god, this is what they did. So Paul says in a brilliant way of teaching, "God, the God of heaven and earth, is not served with human hands as though He needed anything. But He Himself gives to all men life and breath and peace." Do you hear what he's saying? "If you have to feed him, how is he going to protect you and provide for you? If she cannot bathe herself, if you're having to scrounge up food for your god, how is that god going to help you in a time of famine?" It's subversive teaching; it was really brilliant. And then on the creative order, here's the rationale. God is saying, "Don't worship the creative order, because it's simply doing what I tell it to do. Why would you worship the sun for just doing what I tell it to do? I tell it to burn at this temperature, at this position, with this gravitational pull. Why would you go, 'O mighty sun?' Don't worship the wind, it comes out from My storehouses. Don't worship the ocean, it simply does what I tell it to do. Don't worship the natural order.

And then don't worship things you can make with your hands." So for us, because most of us aren't going to make graven images like an idol to put up on an altar in our home, how do you roll that into 2009? Well, I think anything you would make ultimate that you can control with your hands starts to be filed here. Let me give you a big one – religion, works based righteousness, you going "Oh, I'm going to make God like me because of my behavior." That's you creating with your hands. Any type of wanting to get to a certain level of tax bracket or live in a certain type of home, that's you creating with your hands. You can't put your hope in those things and you can't seek help from them. They're not designed to hold them and it will go bad.

So the nature of our relationship is covenantal, it's betrothal, we are His, He is ours. So don't make anything ultimate besides Him. And now He's going to say why. He's going to give you two reasons why you shouldn't this. Verse 5, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." There's two ideas on why God's saying, "Don't break our covenant. Don't break our betrothed relationship with one another to serve and worship something else as ultimate." He gives two reasons. One is the idea of iniquity. The idea of iniquity is to simply grow crooked. So He's saying, "If you put something else ultimate over and above Me, you're going to grow crooked until it breaks off altogether or cripples you." So if you think of scolioses, they can't really spot it until about 3-5 grade, and if it's left unchecked, it's going to deform them and maybe even kill them later in life. But the first 8 or 12 years, they don't feel anything. It's just a slight curvature of the spine that, when it's finally full grown, breaks the back and kills the person. So this is what He's saying. "If you make something else ultimate, if you cheat on Me with some other thing, it's going to cause you to grow crooked until it breaks. And this has effects not only on you mentally, emotionally and physically, but it also on your children." That's what He's saying.

Let me give you a couple of examples of this playing out in the Scriptures. Ezekiel 16:39-40, "And I will give you into [your lovers] hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places." Let me explain how this happens. I'll give one that I often see in females and one I often see in males. A young woman, in her vaulted places, in her lofty ideas, will say, "Out there somewhere is a man who is going to complete me, who is going to make me feel lovely. He doesn't like to hunt, he doesn't like to fish, he doesn't like sports. He was born romantic. He's one of the six natural romantics that God made in this generation. He is going to care for me, he is going to treasure me and he is going to make much of me." By the way, some of that hope is God-given, but some of it's not. She, in her heart and in her mind, elevates man beyond what he's supposed to be. When a man sees that, depending on the level of wickedness, he will either run but more often than not use. With no regard for the soul, no regard for the mind and with no regard for personhood, he will simply use for his own urges and desires. And when that happens, either one of those

scenarios, the vault is shattered, the innocence and naïve purity is taken and destroyed and the lofty ideal is replaced with, "I guess this is just what is." Why? Because you made a god that was not meant to be god. Men make crummy gods. You will never find a man who is going to fulfill all that you wanted life to be. We don't hold that power. Now for men, it's a little bit different. Here's what I see all the time with men. In the vaulted places, in the lofty ideals, daddy didn't hug them a lot, daddy didn't play with them a lot, daddy wasn't around a lot, so you get this, "I am going to show the world that I am worth something, that I'm strong, that I'm not weak, that I'm worthy. I'm going to show them. And so I'm going to get to this level, I'm going to own this, I'm going to do this, I'm going to accomplish this, and I'm going to either win the approval of my dad or I'm going to show him." And then what ends up happening is he either gets there and dad still doesn't care or he never gets there and feels like a failure. Because the approval of man is like chasing the wind. You can run all your life and never catch it. This is what happens when you make things god that weren't meant to be god. They can't hold your hope. And so God here is going, "I'll give you over to these things, but it's going to go bad. You're going to grow crooked." In fact, in Isaiah 55 the prophet is going to ask, "How long are you going to do this? How long are you going to keep chasing after this, chasing after that when it never satisfies you? How long are you going to keep eating things that never fill your belly? How long?" And so the first reason why God's going to tell you not to make things ultimate is because it puts you on a path of iniquity, a crooked growth pattern that will eventually break your back, eventually betray you. And by the way, in this Ezekiel text, that was actually the good part of the text. It gets a lot worse after that. He says, "They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare." And then he says, "They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords." Do you see what God's doing? He's going, "Listen, I'm not trying to steal from you, I'm trying to save you. Don't break out betrothal.

Now that's the first reason. The second reason is the confusing one. In the first part, He says, "Don't bow down and don't serve them because I your God am a jealous God." Now this is wildly confusing. The idea of God being jealous? I'll show you how confusing it is. If you went home today and Googled "Oprah Winfrey + jealous God," you'll find an interview with her where she talks about being 28 years old and sitting in a Baptist with a minister who began to talk about how big God was. He was omniscient, He was all powerful, He was all knowing, He was righteous, He was holy. And she said she felt her soul getting caught up in that. And then the preacher said He was a jealous God. And she says from her own mouth, "From the second I heard that I was done. Because if God is jealous of me, He is not God." Well she misunderstands. It's not like God is in the heavens going, "Look at all that money. Wow." No, but I want to give her a mulligan on that one because it is confusing. In fact, most of us think about jealousy in terms of Galatians 5:20. Maybe you don't even know you're thinking in those terms, but most of you think of jealousy in regards to unrighteous jealousy. Let me give you the overtones of the word. If you just started trying to find definitions, here are the overtones of jealousy. It is selfishness, suspicion and distrust. It implies resentment and hostility towards other people because they enjoy some advantage. It is possessive, demanding and overbearing. It stifles freedom and individuality, it degrades and demeans, it breeds tension and discord, it destroys friendships and marriages. Has anybody been a part of that jealousy? And so with that as a framework, when we hear that God is a jealous God, it's confusing because it makes God seem or appear to be self-centered or possessive. A basic definition of jealousy would simply be someone who is envious of what someone else possesses. That would be just a great simple definition of jealousy, but that's not what's going on in our text. So it appears that there might be two different types of jealousy, one righteous and one unrighteous. Let's look at the text. "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them,..." In this text, He's not jealous of what someone else has, but rather He's jealous because what is rightfully His is being given to someone else. That's different.

Let me try to explain it this way. This July is my 10 year anniversary. I married so monumentally over my head that somebody should write about it. My wife is beautiful, and she doesn't even get that she's beautiful, and I'm just talking

physically striking. Like she'll come home from the store and go, "This guy was so nice to me at the store." I'm like, "Well yeah. Of course he was. He's throwing the game on you, mama." So ten years ago, we stood in front of a church and we entered into a covenant together, we were betrothed that my mind is hers, my heart is hers, my fears are hers, my physical body is hers, the nature of our relationship is unlike any of the other relationships I have. So I love my wife very deeply, and I love my daughter very deeply. It's different one, for better or for worse, as long as we're alive. My daughter is one day going to have to get up and get out of my house. "It's time to go. Daddy loves you. Go to college...Daddy loves you. Get a job...Daddy loves you. She's yours now, buddy." Now if you mistake the first relationship with the second relationship, you get into a lot of unhealthy situations, usually with children who resent you later. So with my marriage, if God gives us 80, I'm in. If God gives one of us cancer or takes away our ability to walk or see or care for ourselves physically, I'm in. This is sanctification, this is mine. I am hers, she is mine. We are the Hebrew word *dode* a mingling of souls. I don't love Lauren because she gives to me; I love Lauren because she's mine, because I'm hers. And there are parts of me that she gets that no one else gets, and there are parts of her that I get that no one else gets. And that's not just a physical thing. It's *dode*, a mingling of souls. It's a really beautiful thing.

Now there's righteous jealousy and unrighteous jealousy. If I see her talking to another man and I become angry and resentful simply because she's talking to another man, that is insecure possessiveness and an over demanding lording over her. It is unhealthy, it is wicked and it is birthed out of my own insecurity and fear and does not at the end of the day have her best in mind or the holiness of our union in mind. It is sinful jealousy. If I feel resentment or anger merely because I see her talking to another man, that would be self-centered possessiveness and unreasonable domination. In other words, it's sinful jealousy. It would stem from my own selfishness and insecurity rather than from my commitment to her and to what is right. However, if I see a man, cunning and crafty, trying to alienate my wife's affections and seduce her and I feel something rise up in me, that is not sinful jealousy. That is righteous jealousy, and you open-hand shame slap that man. That's an overstatement, but I think you're with me. No, in that moment, I'm not going, "I sure hope this works out for me." No, there's an attack on my wife's sensibilities, there's an attack on what's rightfully mine. In fact, the same would be true if a woman here with a wicked heart tries to worm her way into my office to play on my love for God in order to try to put my affection on her instead, to somehow seduce me, in the same way, it would not be wrong for my wife to step in and go, "[Blank] no. She goes to recovery." Why? Because I am hers and she is mine. There are parts of her that are mine and mine alone; there are parts of me that are hers and hers alone. And for anyone to try to take what is not rightfully theirs at the expense of holiness and at the expense of our lives is sinful, wicked and deserves to be stood against. And anyone who would argue contrary is climbing Everest in underwear. It's not going to work. I'll be honest with you. If you're thinking, "Oh come on. Your wife should be able to sleep with whoever she wants to sleep with," you are viewing humanity through the lenses that human beings have no souls and are simply cattle for your amusement and you're wicked and have a dark heart. My wife is mine. I don't share her with others. I am hers. It's a covenant relationship.

The Bible is saying this is how God feels about His people. He is jealous. "You are Mine. Don't cheat on me. Don't whore around." Because you see, Israel is horrible at this. They can never figure it out. Because literally at this time while God is teaching this to Moses, they take all their gold and make a small calf and start to worship it. So God in the middle of telling these things to Moses goes, "Never mind. I'm killing every one of these fools and I'm starting with you. You don't cheat on Me. I will kill every one of them and Moses, I'm going to start with you and we're going to build a great nation." And Moses is like, "Don't kill them. Be patient." And God goes, "No, you don't cheat on Me. I'm going to kill them." And Moses goes, "If you kill them, everyone left in Egypt will say that You simply dragged your people out into the desert to kill them. Your name will be defamed. Don't kill them." And so God goes, "Okay, but you had better go talk to them." So Moses heads down with the tablets, he gets there and sees this little golden calf they made and are worshipping. It says Moses turns bright red and he smashes the tablets and he rebukes them. And then he has to go back up on the mountain to get the tablets again. Now, God's going to chat with him a little bit when he gets up there. Flip

over to Exodus 34. We'll pick it up in verse 10. "And he said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." If you think about this in regards to the New Testament, here's what He's saying, "I am going to drive out all that would imprison you, murder you, shackle you, put you into slavery and harm you. I'm going to drive it out through the cross of Christ. That's justification. You, don't join yourselves with those things that I'm driving out. Don't whore yourself out like that."

Have you ever wondered this? I've often thought about this a lot because it's just confusing. I think I understand human nature pretty well, but why would the Israelites down in the valley make a calf? Why not a bull, a bull, a longhorn or a wolf? At least something that's powerful, frightening and worthy to be worshiped. Like all of those creatures create awe naturally in man. If you see a giant bull, everyone, even the most seasoned rancher, is careful around the bull. "Where is he? There he is. Please don't kill me, Mr. Bull." A lion? The same thing, fear and awe. Even with a wolf at some level, "Be careful. Don't taunt." But a calf? What in a calf makes anybody go, "Oh, everybody down. Get your knees down. There's a calf." Calves are kind of cute and silly and they bounce around and we're like, "Aw, how cute." Why a calf? I think that God in the moment is showing you just how silly it is to make something else ultimate. And within the brokenness of the human spirit, how often what we make something ultimate is really silly? And so God goes, "Don't give to others what was meant for Me. You are betrothed to Me. If you want other lovers, I'll give them to you, but it will wound and hurt you and eventually break you." And so the whole rest of the Old Testament is this cycle of them running after other gods and then coming back to the Lord, running after other gods and then coming back to the Lord, running to other gods and it goes bad and they come back to the Lord. And then we've got 400 years of silence before we get the gospels, and the gospels start out with a man named John preaching the baptism of repentance, which is a return to the Lord. And I think one of the real crimes is that most of us look back at those Sunday school lessons about how Israel kept running away from God and going to other gods and we go, "How silly are they? How dumb are they?" despite the fact that we're all walking in the same exact dance to this very day. Can we not play Sunday school here? Can we not be Stepford?

Honestly, what's uppermost in your affections? What are you really after? What's really uppermost in your heart? Is it God because...? Because that's the weird one. It's "Jesus is uppermost in my affections, but only because I want these things from Him. And the second He doesn't give me these things, I'm going to get angry, frustrated and bitter." So answer the question. What is uppermost in your affections? What are you really after? What's your life really about? I don't know what your answer is. But does your answer make you a whore? Does it make you go, "I don't care how good, how loving, how patient God is, this is what I want – what I can manipulate and control, what I want out of the natural order. So two years ago, we did a sermon series on what's God's response to this. The answer was simple – hell and the cross. This series is going to try to answer the question: What's our right response to this? But that starts next week.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for an extra hour today. An extra hour with our family, an extra with our friends, an extra hour of just feeling really warm air. My hope this morning, Father, is that You would let us feel the weight of our iniquity, that You would let us feel the weight of how often we prefer other ultimates, that You would let us feel the weight of how often we're trying to find help and hope in other things. I pray that we might feel the weight of that and in that feel the futility in that. So we confess that we have. We confess this morning that there are other things that are ultimate to us,

other things that we pursue and then even other things that we're trying to use You to get. And the fact that You could take from us at any moment life, breath and all things but don't despite our repeated infidelity, my hope is that that truth would lead us to repentance. Help us. We need Your help here. O Holy Spirit, we ask for Your help. Show us. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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