

Glory Stolen
Exodus 20:1-2, Exodus 20:15
3/7/2021
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This morning let's go together to God's word as we continue to work through the Ten Commandments as we understand how the Lord desired for His people to be renewed in the desert, in the wilderness. This is what the Lord desires. This morning I want to begin in a place that is important for us to remember as we continue to apply and unpack what the Lord teaches us. This morning, I want to begin in Philippians 2.

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 from selfish ambition 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. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [ESV]

Before we can consider even how the moral law calls us to flee stealing, we must always begin with looking and seeing how God is a God who gives. See how the matchless character and work of Christ, Paul describes, that Jesus made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, emptying Himself of the glory that was due His name to the point of death, death on a cross, that we might share in the redemption and the glory that God has for us in Christ Jesus. Look what God has done, how God has given.

It is from this reflection that I think we can see the ways that God first wants us to understand that embedded in the command, "Do not steal," begins with the blessing and promise of a God who gives. And I believe this is one of the many things that inspired Kirk Franklin years ago when he wrote the hymn, "Silver and Gold." Hear these lyrics.

"Silver and gold, silver and gold. I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold. No fame or fortune, no riches untold. I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold. Don't give me a mansion on the top of the hill. Don't give me the world with a shallow thrill. But just give me a savior. My life he can hold. I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold."

Is Jesus enough? Is what God has given enough?

Hear now God's word as He instructs us from His word on what is glory stolen. Consider what He says. Exodus 20 beginning in verses 1 and 2.

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.

"You shall not steal." [ESV]

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

Now, we ask you, Lord, to open up your word and our hearts that there would be a meeting between the power of your Spirit and the power of your word, and that we would be changed, matured, and reminded that you are the glorious God of heaven and earth. And you have given us yourself. And you call us to rest in the truth and in the reality that you are enough. Help us, O Lord. Help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

This morning as we look together and consider what this commandment is teaching us, we'll do so by looking at three angles. They sort of start at the bottom, the roots of what is being talked about here and commanded against. What are the roots? What's the fruit, then, that comes from those roots? But then what is the restoration? How do we find a way out of our inclination towards theft? Let's look together at roots, fruit, and restoration.

Underneath all of this is the narrative of what God was doing in Israel. He was calling them to follow Him. And it's not a surprise then in the midst of that wilderness as they would travel and follow the Lord, when they wondered and questioned whether the Lord would provide, would they be tempted and drawn towards taking from others?

Before we can actually talk about what is the fruit, which is ultimately what is being referred to as theft, we have to understand the roots of theft that I believe is the place where we ought to begin. What might have been the places where Israel would struggle? Where are the places that we in modern day life struggle? I would suggest they are no different. But they must be paid attention to because unless we understand the roots of the fruit that is stealing and theft, we will not really be able to upend its power in our lives.

So the roots. There are three I want us to consider. They're not the only three, but there are three I believe we should consider. Fear. Underneath the inclination to steal, the action of theft, is fear. And in that fear, formed in a question, will I have enough? What if that check doesn't come in? What if that raise is not realized? What if that tax return doesn't come in at the right time? What if the Lord doesn't provide? And the heart can easily become gripped with fear that at its very base is the question, will God provide?

This is something that the Lord has already instructed them in regard to this in the law when He says, "You shall have no other gods before me." "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." He's already said, you do not need to fear anything other than me who is the redeeming God. Do you see how fear can begin to be the root that leads to the action and desire to steal? Will I have enough? Do I have enough?

But not just fear, but also pride. Sometimes these travel together. I'm afraid I won't have enough, but the reality is I believe I deserve better than I have. And I want what someone else has, and I want it for me. I deserve better. How dare they not recognize? How could God not provide? Doesn't He see? And look at how they wear it. I just want a little bit for me.

Pride and fear are often best friends. Fear almost has a tinge of humility at times, but underneath it oftentimes is a pride. I want what they have because I believe I deserve it.

But then the third of the three amigos as the roots of theft and stealing is greed. And greed is different than saying, I'm enjoying a possession. It's good and right to have private property. That's inferred in the command because if you're stealing, you're stealing somebody else's property. Private property's fine. It's okay to have possessions. But the nature of greed isn't just finding and trying to find happiness and possessions. It certainly involves that. But greed and avarice is actually that there's some payoff, some very addictive strong drug that is, I enjoy the process of gaining possession. Because if greed was anything other than that notion that once you gain, it would be enough — but that's the funny thing. When greed begins to root down in our lives, it doesn't matter how much we have. It's not enough. Not necessarily because it comes from fear, but it comes from pride. There's something I'm enjoying

about taking or gaming the system or seeing an opportunity to game someone else. It's a powerful drug when you realize you can use your gifts and your skill set to find that lane that maybe somebody else hasn't found, that maybe other people might need this, and so maybe I can do this. And you feel the power of control. I've come up with a scheme. I love the game. I want the wanting of more.

It's the wanting of want. It's the enjoyment of it. And then when that travels together with fear and pride, unnoticed, unrecognized, it will find its way to the surface in a whole host of ways which I am calling here fruits. They're not good fruits, but they are fruits, nonetheless. Desires are not easy animals to control. Desires left unchecked will leak out and begin to fuel action.

And it's not just the action. If we are not aware that fear and pride and greed is at work underneath the surface, that is a call to repentance. The giving ourselves to those desires, not just their fruit but just to the desires, is something we must be aware of that the Bible calls us to repent of. But if left unchecked, it will lead to the fruit.

Consider one commentator as I share what he says. He says,

"Stealing and theft threatens the social order and causes pain to others by undermining the ability to possess with sure access things that are useful and needful. You steal food; someone goes without food. You steal a farm animal, and you interrupt someone else's farming. You steal a child; you tear a family apart. You steal clothes; you cause someone else who is in need to actually suffer."

But what's interesting about the nature of theft is if I say the word "stealing," what comes to your mind? A movie perhaps. Drama. In your mind's eye, don't we often think it's about going and stealing an object from someone, and it doesn't belong to them, but they take it? But what we fail to see is that theft actually is more than just a discrete act of stealing an object or objects from another individual or group. It's actually beginning to shred the social order because when theft is allowed to go unchecked, then trust is eroded, cynicism abounds, and distance is created. More laws and policies have to be put in place. More protections have to be built and applied. And that goes for federal level, local level, down to the individual level, all the way down to neighborhood watch, all the way down to me going to my security panel each night and hitting the security code.

The fact that we have to have these things is the nature that there's not a single human being who hears my voice that has not been impacted or effected in one way or the other by the reality of the fruits of theft and the tearing apart of society. So it is more than just merely the taking of an item or items from another. We are causing harm to everyone whether they know we've done it or not.

But more than that, the Westminster Larger Catechism, one of the catechisms of our church, asks this question. "What are the sins that are forbidden by the eighth commandment?" I'll name just a few here of what it says. "The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment include theft, robbery, slavery, and receiving anything that is stolen, fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, injustice, and unfaithfulness in contracts, oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits," which is just a spurious lawsuit that you're doing to try to get something from someone else.

"Unjust enclosures, deprivation, engrossing commodities to enhance the price, to drive up the price, unlawful callings or unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what rightfully belongs to them, or of enriching ourselves, covetousness, ignorant prizing and effecting worldly goods, defrauding ourselves of due use and comfort of the estate which God has given to us."

It has a whole enormous list. And just considering a few of those, the whole structure of slavery from its beginning was always a violation of not just the image of God in another human being. It is actually

stealing and theft by owning another human being, which is still present in today's world. Sex slavery, predatory interest rates.

I remember as a pastor in Florida when I first became aware of the whole idea of reverse mortgages. It was a whole industry. Not all of it is bad. I'm not suggesting that. But when you begin to see the commercials, the direct mail, and the phone calls that happen to those who are elderly, and it's packaged for them as a way to get just a little bit more. They're preying on the vulnerability of those who feel that they're at the end of their rope and the end of their lives. They're dressing it up in such a way as to hook them. Plagiarism. Tax fraud. Well, it's just the government. They won't miss it. They've already taken enough from me anyway.

My mother who worked for State Farm for 25 years would come home and often tell me the stories, and she would always, and still does, phrase it like this. She says, "Randy, one thing I've learned about human beings is that there are people out there who will stay up 24 hours a way figuring out a way to gain the system because insurance fraud only dries up every single one of our insurance rates." Not just physical property insurance, but medical insurance as well.

Bank fraud, as we saw happen in the Great Recession as I was pastoring very close to New York City. And a lot of our congregation was impacted because they worked for many of these institutions, and they could see the ways in which the market is structured in such a way to gain the system at the disadvantage of others. And banking laws that allow banks to do the kinds of predatory lending because they know that the person they're lending to cannot repay it, and yet they simply repackage it to gain the system to get more for themselves.

How many people suffered, some at their own hands? Others suffered because they were sold a bill of goods. They suffered, and yet the people responsible for those predatory actions did not land in jail. And when this is allowed to go on year after year, decade after decade, what we begin to see is the tearing apart of society. Is it any wonder, then, why we have such a hard time in our culture in this day actually trusting institutions, trusting authorities, and trusting one another?

And I would also suggest us to consider this. You might be sitting there and saying, okay, I'm thinking about these things. Check, okay, I didn't do that. Check, don't do that. Check, not an issue for me. Check, I see it, but not me. We're thinking about this. And yet I want you to consider for just a moment when it says, "Do not steal."

Let's put on our biblical imagination and unpack the whole of scripture in this one picture. Ultimately, what if we just consider for a moment that stealing and theft, born of pride, fear, greed, and ultimately suspicion of God and His goodness, and a desire for us to be more than we really are, that at the heart of the sin of Adam and Eve is the theft of God's glory. This isn't the command where we get to and go, phew, made it through adultery and, you know, all that other stuff. I'm good on this one. I pay my taxes. I fulfill my contracts. But what if every time we fail? And I don't know about your abiding sin, but this is one of mine. I so much want to trust and depend on myself. But at every point at which I am tempted and fall in to trusting myself, I'm committing theft from glory that is due to God alone. I've got this, God. I'm good. I've got all this stuff over here. I'll trust you for the big stuff. And even then, I kind of know what I need to do. Theft is glory stolen. The glory and honor due to our neighbor and the glory and honor due, most importantly, to our God who has given.

Friends, if you were raised in a Presbyterian tradition, do you remember the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism? "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." All sin is a form of theft. Lord, have mercy.

But the good news is we have a way in which we see that this isn't God's way of coming after us and saying, how dare you. God invites us into restoration. And we see two amazing pictures, but very different pictures, of how God invites us into restoration and away from stealing glory. The first happens in the ministry of Jesus. This is in Luke 18.

And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" [ESV]

Was Jesus critiquing wealth? No, He was warning us about the problem of possessing and the temptation of possessions. But what is beautiful is that Jesus, though the man does not come to Jesus's invitation, looks at him with sadness. He is for all intents and purposes saying to this man as He says to each of us this morning, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

This is an opportunity for us to say, Lord, where am I not wanting to yield to your Lordship, and I want to keep it for myself? Where have I committed fraud? Where have I allowed the roots of fear and greed and pride to take root? Lord, you have invited me with your compassion. Restoration is offered to us.

But then just one chapter later recorded for us in Luke, we hear yet another invitation to another individual. And this is Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus "ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully." Do you hear the reception? Something's happened in the center of Zacchaeus's heart.

And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." [ESV]

Was Jesus saying that salvation has come because Zacchaeus did a good thing? No. What happened in the heart of Zacchaeus is he was willing to see how God was giving and revealing His revealing heart through the ministry of Jesus, and that broke Zacchaeus open. And there the light of God, the Holy Spirit began to show him how he as a Jew had defrauded his fellow Jews working for the Roman government, how he abused his position to scrape some for the Roman government but keep a little bit on the side for himself. He enriched and padded his pockets. And now he says, but if I have you, I can give what I have away, and I will repay those whom I have defrauded, not just what I have taken but multiplied. That is a man who's come to the heart of who he is and seen how greed and fear and pride had taken root, but that Jesus had come through the power of the word and the power of His presence with the invitation, saying, come to me. And in his own way, Zacchaeus is saying, Jesus is enough.

This is the restoration that is on offer to us. I ask you, friends, is Jesus enough? Can we trust Him to provide and what He has already provided as saying, this is God's will? Thank you, Lord. We might be broke, but we are not poor. And God can use my being broke and my brokenness to display His faithfulness. Can we say, I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold? If yes, then we are freed up to live in the kingdom in radically new ways. We then see our paychecks, our possessions as not something that are less valuable but something that actually gives honor to the one who has given them to us. And as Jesus said, when we give a drink and food and clothing to another, we're doing it as unto the Lord. We are

freed up by the kingdom to take what we have and to bless the others, not take from the others. And in so doing, as we give in the kingdom of God to any who are in need, or to just give whether people are in need or not, and as we give to the Lord in our gifts and our offerings, we are giving God the glory, and we are saying one giant, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah. God, Jesus, is good.

This is what He wants for us, that we would break open the perfume of our riches and say, I don't need glory and riches, silver and gold. But what I have I will give that you would be praised. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you this morning for your word. I pray that you would free us from fear and pride and greed, free us from our desire and clamoring after our own glory. Forgive us for stealing yours. Lord, forgive us and have mercy. Lord, help us to say that Jesus is enough that we might give you the glory. In Jesus's name. Amen.