

Deuteronomy 5

The more that I read these commandments and ponder over them and realise the foundational nature of them in Israelite society I realise that we need to look at them closely. I've been staggered just what these commandments reveal about our awesome God, the God who is exclusively committed to us. He calls us to the very highest level of commitment to him and his commandments because in obeying and living out the commandments we will experience the true and flourishing life that he desires for us.

We've looked at the first four commandments which focus on God. Remember what we said – God is exclusively committed to us and calls us to be exclusively committed to him – like the footy players totally focused or the marriage relationship – husband and wife totally committed to each other, exclusively committed. And these 10 Commandments are God's gracious instructions so that the Israelite people can live in the promised land happily and flourish – they are for our flourishing.

Another helpful way of thinking about these Commandments is as instructions from a Father to a son. God is a good father, and he gives direction, purpose and order to Israel's life – the boundaries that make for freedom. The ten commandments are "Father-son talk", telling Israel how he must live if he's to be a true son, God's representative in the world who would reveal God himself. Adam failed as the first son, now Israel is to act as God's son; finally there would come another Son, the last Adam, the one who is the spitting image of Father Yahweh, God's son, Jesus who fulfils and embodies these ten commandments so we can be saved.

So, No.5 – Honour your father and mother, as the lord has commanded you , so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

The focus now comes on the family, the basic unit of society. One thing to note is that the commandment is not addressed primarily to children, though obviously they would be included. This command is speaking to adults; these are all adults who are listening in as they prepare to go into the promised land. We're reminded of the broad, extended nature of the Israelite family, it was an extended family. God is not just saying here, this is how to have a happy family, but he is laying down a principle that this family setup is to be the foundation of society and also part of the structure of God's covenant relationship with Israel.

This commandment is for the ordering of society. Without good parenting and the obedience of children there is no intergenerational stability in society. If you want to live long in the land then you have to have this kind of stability.

This commandment does not limit its applicability to good fathers. The text does not say, "Honour your father, so long as he is good or righteous." God wants us to respect the structures that God has given, because all who are in a position of leadership or power have been given it by God. We may, at times, have to defy that authority in order to obey God; but as much as it is possible for us, we should honour them.

It's significant in that male-dominated society that the honour is for both father **and mother**. This ought to be enforced in the home and modelled by the father. The children should not be permitted to dishonour their mother. The father should teach and demonstrate this.

To honour your father and mother does not presuppose that at every stage you should obey them. Genesis 2 speaks of there being a new home that is set up. We leave our mothers and fathers and cleave to our spouses. The practical implications of leaving father and mother means that we stay in touch, pray for them, care for their needs, and know their counsel.

Where this commandment is breaking down, not only is God being dishonoured, but the stability of the culture is breaking down too.

But there is more to this command than this, I think. I have been helped with some thoughts from John Lin of Redeemer church in New York.

Mother and father was a term used not just for biological parents but also for other people in the life of the Israelite community and family. Authoritative figures included not just parents or grandparents, but also teachers, prophets, other leaders – eg. Moses is called Father. Belinda talked a few weeks ago about a spiritual mother, not her biological mother but another who was mature in faith and helped and guided her in her maturity in faith. So father and mother does not just apply to direct parents but the whole spectrum of those who had some authority in their lives; who gave direction in their lives.

What made the promised land so special was not just that it was a great place to live but that it was a place of community, a place you could finally call home. God was establishing a community in this land. This was really the key aspect, being part of God's community. A place of deep relationship. This is why it says that "it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you". There was a condition attached to this promise. If you want things to go well in the new land that God was giving you had to honour your father and mother, the authoritative figures in the community. And that included honouring THE Father, God, which

takes us back to the first commandment doesn't it? However, if you did not honour mother and father, and all those in authority, above all God, there would be consequences. You would not just be evicted from the land, you wouldn't just lose the productive land to work, but most importantly you would be stripped of all the benefits and true fruits of the land, which was community. What we see in this 5th commandment is that we were made to live and be connected and to be defined in the context of a community, a place that we could call home. That's what God is setting up here. The community of authority figures, like parents, and other community leaders will help define the person I will become. The community needed faithful parents, and teachers, and leaders though, didn't it? This would be the basis of passing on from generation to generation the nurturing of children to honour God. The community would be the foundation of this passing on of how we were to be defined. Who were we? Who was our God? Who did we serve?

So what does it mean to honour them?

In our day and age we have voices in our society saying to us, "I'm an independent thinker I don't need to be defined by something outside of myself, I can work out how I want to be defined, what's best for me". Really! We are constantly being formed by authorities around us – employer; parents; police, education authorities.

Some of you might remember the movie, It's a Wonderful Life – the hero, George Bailey wanted to go to college, to go to the war, to leave sleepy old Bedford Falls, but never does - he keep on helping people and setting aside his dreams. but he realises that he has had a wonderful life. He gives up what he thought he wanted for the needs of the community and they authoritatively guide his life, to be his mother and his father as it were. It's precisely because he'd given of himself that he ultimately had

everything that he really needed which contributed to a wonderful life, in old Bedford Falls, but a home, a loving community.

When I sacrifice my own ambitions and my personal desires, when I give up my individual agendas for the sake of community and when you spend your life serving people what do you get – you get Bedford Falls, a home, a place that is full and warm and embracing and rich and fruitful. But when you sacrifice your community, and you give up your family, the people around you, the people who need your service; when you give these things up for the sake of personal dreams, selfish ambitions, a sinful individualistic agenda, what do you get? We get a life without community which is characterised by selfishness, oppression of the poor and the weak. The prophets of the Old Testament describe the Israelite community which abandoned God's word – it was broken as people just looked after their own selves. People treated other unjustly, there was no mercy or kindness. It was a broken community that went into exile. So if community is broken where do we go?

I want to take us on a bit of a history lesson here.

The Jews were the first community or society to talk about linear history. Most ancient societies had a cyclical view of history – endless cycle of birth and rebirth. But for Jews history was moving towards a climax. And so in Jewish life there is the recounting again and again of the story of where they had been, the exodus and where they were going to, the promised land, and where they would one day go and what they would become. They were constantly to tell the story to each other and then to enact it and live it out.

So what's the climax – where's the story leading to. Remember the story back in Exodus. God said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go; you're taking my

first born son (Israel, the Israelite people) so I will take your first born son.” And we saw that on the Passover night.

And then we go fast forward 1400 years to another Son.

In Matthew 2 this Son comes back out of Egypt to Palestine – Jesus comes back from Egypt – to fulfil the prophecy “out of Egypt I called my son”

See Jesus again – in baptism goes through the waters – just like Israel, God’s son had once done through the Red Sea;

Jesus in the desert - just like Israel, God’s son had once done;

Jesus on the mountain - just like Israel, God’s son had once done;

Jesus having the Passover - just like Israel, God’s son had once done.

The big difference though. Throughout the gospels Jesus displays perfect obedience to the Father, perfectly honouring the Father in every way as a son, and in fact he even honoured the Father in ways that Israel the Son had never done before.

We find later in Israel’s history that they get booted out of the land, because they do not obey and honour the Father; but we find no such thing with Jesus. What we see in Jesus is that he perfectly honoured his Father; perfectly submitted to his father’s authority. In every way he honoured his father above himself. And yet on the cross Jesus was orphaned; he was cut off from his Father; he was banished and he was utterly exiled from life in the land, treated as homeless and without an inheritance; no community, no friendship, no family, no home. Which is why on the cross the cry of Jesus is not, “My Father”, as it had been

through the rest of the gospels, but “Why have you forsaken me,my God”.

But you see why he did it. it was to ensure that we could live long and that it may go well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. Jesus did this for us so you would never lose sight of your father , never be homeless, never be an orphan; and you would never be without a community or a family or a home again. When you allow yourself to be formed and moulded and changed by a community of grace, a community that’s focused on the gospel that’s continually reminding you of where you’ve been; slaves who’ve been delivered through the exodus, and now into the Promised land...We want to understand what Jesus has done – he gave his life that we might have a home; became an orphan that we might have a family, a Father, a community.

The voice we need to listen to is the voice of Jesus – his is the authoritative voice. When we listen to just this voice it will make us forget every other voice that has said You weren’t good enough; or you weren’t smart enough or weren’t worth enough; or even the ones that said you are good enough, smart enough, worthy enough – this authoritative voice says you weren’t worthy enough but because of the death of my Son for you, the one in whom I am well pleased, because of his death I have counted you worthy enough, and now in you , I am well pleased. Some of you sitting here this morning for your entire lives have been trying to live up to or maintain a standard, or you have been crushed by a standard that someone has placed upon you. You may have had parents who have controlled you. And in many respects the only way that you can honour a parent who has controlled your life is to find your ultimate identity in the ultimate family with the ultimate father. The only way you can honour a parent who has misused their authority is to forgive; and the only way you can do that is if you find your ultimate identity in the ultimate family

with the ultimate father. Jesus says to us, “Come to me. Come to the Father who loves you.”

The purpose of the 5th commandment was to guard against every other story, every other narrative, every other mother or father by which we define ourselves we leave us running on a treadmill running nowhere. We are to honour our father and mother but the Gospel is that you are adopted as sons and daughters; this is the story by which we define ourselves as the church. This story will always lead us home.

I’m going to leave it there. And we’re going to pick up on the 7th Commandment next week. It’s closely linked in with this 5th commandment. Remember, we have been brought into a new community to live as children of a Father who is exclusively committed to us. Let us honour him and treasure him because he has brought us into his kingdom land. And when we honour him we will truly be able to honour our mother and father.