

***“GOD’S TOP TEN!”***

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF EXODUS (20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20) (THE TEN COMMANDMENTS) AND PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON OCTOBER 5, 2014**

**HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED THAT OUR CULTURE IS OBSESSED WITH “TOP TEN” THINGS? .....THINK ABOUT IT FOR A MOMENT..... YOU PROBABLY HAVE SEEN A TOP TEN LIST VERY RECENTLY. AFTER LAST WEEKEND’S SLATE OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL GAMES ----- FANS ARE WAITING FOR THE NEW COLLEGE FOOTBALL BCS TOP TEN TEAMS—YOU CAN ALSO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AND USA TODAY POLLS TO SEE HOW YOUR FAVORITE TEAM MAY BE FARING -----MANY PEOPLE WAIT EVERYDAY TO SEE ESPN’S SPORTS CENTER TOP TEN PLAYS OF THE DAY.**

**EVERY YEAR *FORBES* MAGAZINE LISTS THE TOP TEN WEALTHIEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, AND THE *NEW YORK TIMES* HIGHLIGHTS THE TOP TEN COLLEGES IN THE US, AND *PEOPLE* MAGAZINE RATES THE TOP TEN MOST BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE..... IT SEEMS LIKE EVERY MAGAZINE HAS A TOP-TEN ARTICLE ADVERTISED ON THE FRONT COVER OF EVERY SINGLE ISSUE. BUT OUR “TOP TEN” OBSESSION DOESN’T STOP WITH NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES.**

**NO INDEED ----- EVERY WEEK ON THE RADIO THERE IS A LIST OF THE TOP TEN SONGS. LATE NIGHT T.V. PROGRAMS LIKE THE DAILY SHOW WITH JON STEWART HAVE TOP TEN LISTS OF VARIOUS POLITICAL AND CULTURE ABSURDITIES.....AND OF COURSE DAVE LETTERMAN’S TOP TEN LISTS HAVE MADE HIM FAMOUS.....**

**THERE IS A TOP TEN NEW YORK BESTSELLERS FOR THE MOST POPULAR BOOKS EACH WEEK..... EVEN THE FBI HAS A TOP TEN MOST WANTED LIST THAT IS OCCASIONALLY SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC..... THERE ARE SEVERAL WEBSITES SOLELY DEVOTED TO TOP TEN LISTS..... IF YOU WANT YOU CAN VISIT WEBSITES LIKE TOPTENZ.NET AND TOP-10-LIST.ORG TO FIND TOP TEN LISTS FROM THE TOP TEN MOST MISUNDERSTOOD CREATURES TO THE TOP TEN TEEN COMEDIES TO EVEN THE TOP TEN VIDEO GAMES BASED ON BOOKS. THEY HAVE TOP TEN LISTS FROM EVERY CATEGORY YOU CAN POSSIBLY THINK OF.**

**SOMETIMES I THINK WE CAN NAME THESE KINDS OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT, ABSURD OR FUNNY TOP TEN**

**LISTS BETTER THAN WE CAN NAME GOD'S TOP TEN  
HERE IN THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF  
EXODUS..... AND I THINK SOMETIMES WE ARE EVEN  
MORE EXCITED TO TALK ABOUT WHOSE IN THE TOP TEN  
OF THE BCS POLL AND SUCH, BUT WE ARE MUCH LESS  
EXCITED OR EVEN DESIRE TO TALK ABOUT THE TOP  
TEN COMMANDMENTS GOD GAVE US THROUGH MOSES.  
WHEN SOMEONE BRINGS UP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS  
WE MAY NOD OUR HEADS AND SAY, "YEAH, I KNOW  
THEM." BUT DO WE? DO WE *REALLY* KNOW THE TEN  
COMMANDMENTS, OR DO WE REALLY JUST KNOW  
ABOUT THEM—THAT THEY EXIST AND WERE GIVEN TO  
MOSES FROM GOD ON MT. SINAI?**

**IS THAT THE EXTENT THAT WE KNOW THE TEN  
COMMANDMENTS? PERHAPS YOU KNOW AND CAN  
NAME A FEW, OR MAYBE YOU CAN NAME ALL OF THEM,**

**BUT DOES THAT MEAN THAT WE KNOW WHAT THEY  
REALLY MEAN FOR US TODAY, WHAT THEY MEAN FOR  
US AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD?**

**I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK ABOUT KEVIN SMITH'S 1999  
MOVIE *DOGMA* WITH BEN AFFLECK, MATT DAMON, ALAN  
RICKMAN, THE LATE GEORGE CARLIN AND A WHOLE  
CAST OF NOW HOLLYWOOD A-LISTERS. ALAN RICKMAN  
PLAYS METATRON -----WHO IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE  
VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY.**

**IN ONE SCENE HE SAYS, "TELL A PERSON THAT YOU'RE  
THE METATRON AND THEY STARE AT YOU BLANKLY.  
MENTION SOMETHING OUT OF A CHARLTON HESTON**

**MOVIE AND SUDDENLY EVERYBODY IS A THEOLOGY SCHOLAR.”**

**I THINK THERE IS SOME TRUTH IN THE LATTER PART OF HIS STATEMENT. I WONDER HOW MANY PEOPLE ASSOCIATE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WITH CHARLTON HESTON AND CECIL DEMILLE’S FAMOUS MOVIE BETTER THAN GOD AND THE BIBLE.**

**PERHAPS WE DON’T LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS BECAUSE THEY SOUND SO ARCHAIC AND IRRELEVANT, YOU KNOW……JUST A BUNCH OF RULES, A LIST OF DO’S AND DON’TS…… PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE OVER THE THOUSANDS OF YEARS SINCE MOSES RECEIVED GOD’S TEN COMMANDMENTS THE LANGUAGE, CONTEXT, OR BACKGROUND STORY, AND**

**MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE HAS BEEN WATERED  
DOWN OR LOST**

**AND..... THERE IS EVEN MORE -----“COMMANDMENTS”  
REALLY ISN’T A GOOD TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW  
WORD FOR COMMANDMENTS HERE IN EXODUS 20..... A  
BETTER TRANSLATION IS GOD’S “TEN WORDS.” -----  
THESE TEN WORDS ARE NOT SO MUCH TIMELESS  
TRUTHS OR JUST MERELY GOOD ADVICE FROM GOD,  
BUT WORDS OF LIFE GIVEN TO A PEOPLE WHO GOD  
DELIVERED FROM SLAVERY TO LIFE, TO A NEW LIFE IN  
GOD FULL OF HOPE AND ASSURANCE.....**

**AS CHRISTIANS WE SAY THE FIRST “WORD” GIVEN TO  
MOSES IS “YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE  
ME.” -----BUT IN JUDAISM THE FIRST WORD IS “I AM THE  
LORD YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE**

**LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY; YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.”**

**THESE TEN WORDS REMIND US WHO IS OUR GOD AND THEY ARE ABOUT LIFE IN GOD AND OUR RESPONSE TO GOD’S OUTPOURING GRACE.**

**TOO OFTEN TODAY WE READ THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS BINDING RULES AND JUST MORE REGULATIONS FOR OUR LIVES OF WHAT AND WHAT NOT TO DO AS CHRISTIANS; WE DON’T THINK OF GRACE, BUT INSTEAD WE THINK OF A GOD WHO WANTS US TO FOLLOW A BUNCH OF RULES.**

**BUT IN THE FIRST VERSE OF TODAY’S MESSAGE FROM EXODUS ---- GOD REMINDS US THAT HE IS THE AUTHOR OF TRUE FREEDOM.....**



**WE HUMANS HAVE MANY WAYS TO TOSS OURSELVES INTO ONE SORT OF SLAVERY OR ANOTHER—WE MAKE OURSELVES SLAVES OF THIS WORLD SO EASILY----- SLAVES TO WORK, PEOPLE, MONEY, SEX, DRUGS, ALCOHOL, MATERIAL THINGS, AND ALL SORTS OF THINGS THAT ROB US OF TRUE LIFE, BUT EXODUS 20 REMINDS US THAT GOD IS EVER READY TO BRING US OUT OF SLAVERY, TO BRING US OUT OF WHATEVER HAS US IN BONDAGE THAT KEEPS US FROM LIFE AND FREEDOM.**

**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE A GIFT TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SET FREE. THEY ARE WORDS OF LIFE THAT SHOW HOW FREEDOM CAN BE KEPT, HOW WE CAN LIVE**

**LIFE TOGETHER AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD..... THEY ARE NOT AN ASSAULT COURSE, A BARRIER TO BE OVERCOME, OR A CHECK LIST OF THINGS WE NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO GAIN FREEDOM..... FREEDOM IS A GIFT FROM GOD, NOT SOMETHING THAT CAN BE EARNED BY YEARS OF STRIVING, LABORING, TOILING OR WORKING..... THESE WORDS OF LIFE ARE A MEANS OF GRACE THROUGH WHICH WE COME TO KNOW THE FREEDOM AND FULL LIFE GOD CREATED US FOR. THE COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT A PRISON OR A STRAJTJACKET IN WHICH GOD RESTRICTS AND HOLDS DOWN HIS PEOPLE FROM ENJOYING LIFE. GOD HAS DONE WHAT HUMANITY COULD NOT AND CANNOT DO FOR ITSELF; GOD GAVE THE HEBREW PEOPLE FREEDOM IN THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA. AND IN EXODUS GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE A SECOND**

**GIFT—THE MEANS OF KEEPING THAT FREEDOM..... IN THE WHOLE STORY OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE, FROM THEIR SLAVERY, TO MOSES CONFRONTING PHARAOH TO THE PLAGUES, TO THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA, TO WANDERING IN THE DESERT, TO GOD PROVIDING MANNA FROM HEAVEN—GOD HAS SHOWN WHO HE IS AND WHAT TRUE FREEDOM WE CAN HAVE IN HIM.**

**GOD’S TOP TEN WORDS FOR OUR LIVES REMIND US THAT OUR GOD IS LIVING, ACTIVE AND PRESENT IN THE LIVES OF ALL PEOPLE, BUT THAT LIVING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD BRINGS RESPONSIBILITY OR RESPONSIBLE GRACE AS WE METHODISTS LIKE TO SAY.**

**IN GERMAN THEOLOGIAN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER’S MOST FAMOUS BOOK *THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP* PUBLISHED IN 1937 IN THE FACE OF NAZI GERMANY,**

**BONHOEFFER WRITES ABOUT CHEAP AND COSTLY GRACE..... HE SAYS, "CHEAP GRACE IS THE DEADLY ENEMY OF OUR CHURCH. WE ARE FIGHTING TODAY FOR COSTLY GRACE... GRACE IS REPRESENTED AS THE CHURCH'S INEXHAUSTIBLE TREASURY, FROM WHICH SHE SHOWERS BLESSINGS WITH GENEROUS HANDS, WITHOUT ASKING QUESTIONS OR FIXING LIMITS. GRACE WITHOUT PRICE; GRACE WITHOUT COST! THE ESSENCE OF GRACE, WE SUPPOSE, IS THAT THE ACCOUNT HAS BEEN PAID IN ADVANCE; AND, BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN PAID, EVERYTHING CAN BE HAD FOR NOTHING...**

**CHEAP GRACE MEANS THE JUSTIFICATION OF SIN WITHOUT THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE SINNER. GRACE ALONE DOES EVERYTHING THEY SAY, AND SO**

**EVERYTHING CAN REMAIN AS IT WAS BEFORE... CHEAP GRACE IS THE GRACE WE BESTOW ON OURSELVES. CHEAP GRACE IS THE PREACHING OF FORGIVENESS WITHOUT REQUIRING REPENTANCE, BAPTISM WITHOUT CHURCH DISCIPLINE, COMMUNION WITHOUT CONFESSION.... CHEAP GRACE IS GRACE WITHOUT DISCIPLESHIP, GRACE WITHOUT THE CROSS, GRACE WITHOUT JESUS CHRIST, LIVING AND INCARNATE... COSTLY GRACE IS THE GOSPEL WHICH MUST BE SOUGHT AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN, THE GIFT WHICH MUST BE ASKED FOR, THE DOOR AT WHICH A MAN MUST KNOCK.**

**SUCH GRACE IS COSTLY BECAUSE IT CALLS US TO FOLLOW, AND IT IS GRACE BECAUSE IT CALLS US TO FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST. IT IS COSTLY BECAUSE IT COST A MAN HIS LIFE, AND IT IS GRACE BECAUSE IT GIVES A**

***MAN THE ONLY TRUE LIFE. IT IS COSTLY BECAUSE IT CONDEMNNS SIN, AND GRACE BECAUSE IT JUSTIFIES THE SINNER...COSTLY GRACE CONFRONTS US AS A GRACIOUS CALL TO FOLLOW JESUS."***

**TODAY WE OFTEN HEAR FREEDOM ISN'T FREE. WELL, THAT ISN'T TRUE OF THOSE WHO CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS. GOD HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM AS A GIFT; IT IS FREE. BUT THAT FREEDOM IS IN HIM, AND NOT HOW WE CHOOSE TO INTERPRET THAT FREEDOM.**

**AS ELEANOR ROOSEVELT SAID, "WITH GREAT FREEDOM COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY." I THINK THAT IS WHAT BONHOEFFER WAS TALKING ABOUT WITH CHEAP AND COSTLY GRACE, AND I THINK THAT IS THE MESSAGE OF OUR READING TODAY. GOD WANTS US TO HAVE**

**FREEDOM AND TO ENJOY A FULL LIFE IN THE HERE AND NOW, BUT HE HAS ALSO GIVEN US A MEANS OF KEEPING OUR FREEDOM AND WAYS TO ENJOY THAT FREEDOM AND TO PROTECT US AND TO NURTURE US— AND THOSE WAYS ARE FOUND IN GOD’S TOP TEN WORDS TO LIVE BY.**

**GOD HAS GIVEN US WORDS OF LIFE:**

**PUT GOD FIRST**

**WORSHIP ONLY GOD**

**USE GOD’S NAME WITH RESPECT**

**REMEMBER GOD’S SABBATH**

**RESPECT YOUR PARENTS**

**DON'T HURT OTHERS**

**BE FAITHFUL IN MARRIAGE**

**DON'T STEAL**

**DON'T LIE**

**DON'T BE ENVIOUS OF OTHERS**

**THESE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE A CALL TO FOLLOW  
GOD, A CALL JESUS REMINDS US OF IN THE NEW  
TESTAMENT WHEN HE SUMMARIZES THESE TEN WORDS  
IN JUST TWO WORDS: LOVE GOD AND LOVE YOUR  
NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**

**EACH OF THESE TEN WORDS OF LIFE DEAL WITH  
LOVING GOD, LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS AND LOVING  
OURSELVES. SO, WHAT DOES THAT TELL US ABOUT**



**GOD'S TOP TEN WORDS FOR OUR LIVES? WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF FREEDOM? LOVE. LOVE IS AT THE HEART OF FREEDOM. GOD'S TEN WORDS IN EXODUS WERE GIVEN TO US OUT OF LOVE, AS A PARENT LOOKS AFTER CHILDREN.**

**OUR BIBLES TELL US THAT GOD IS LOVE. WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED NOW? LOVE, SWEET, LOVE, SAYS THAT TOP TEN SONG FROM 1965..... BUT LOVES IS ALSO WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS THE WORLD NEEDS. THE WORLD NEEDS GOD, AND AS DISCIPLES OF GOD WE ARE CALLED TO MAKE KNOWN GOD'S LOVE IN THE WORLD, A LOVE SO GREAT THAT IT HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD, SO THAT ALL MAY KNOW THE FREEDOM GOD OFFERS.**

**THAT IS A BIG CALLING—A CALLING THAT CAN SEEM  
VERY OVERWHELMING AND PERHAPS SO MUCH SO  
THAT WE DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN OR GO ABOUT  
LIVING INTO THIS CALLING.**

***BUT RIGHT HERE IN THIS PLACE-----TODAY --- RIGHT  
NOW ----- WE CAN BEGIN WITH THESE TEN WORDS IN  
EXODUS 20. WE CAN BEGIN BY LEARNING THEM, LIVING  
THEM, ALLOWING THEM TO SHAPE OUR LIVES AND OUR  
RELATIONSHIPS..... WE CAN MAKE THESE OUR TOP  
TEN WORDS TO LIVE BY, KNOWING THAT WE ARE NOT  
ALONE, BUT THAT IN THESE TOP TEN WORDS THERE IS  
UNITY WITH OUR CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
AROUND THE WORLD; THERE IS A COMMON GROUND  
WHICH WE CAN ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND  
REMIND EACH OTHER OF THE LIFE IN FREEDOM WE  
HAVE ALL BEEN CALLED.***

**I ENCOURAGE YOU TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH THESE**  
**TEN WORDS ----- DON'T LET THEM INTIMIDATE YOU, BUT**  
**OPEN YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR LIVES TO GOD'S LOVE**  
**SPEAKING TO THE WORLD THROUGH THESE**  
**COMMANDMENTS. GOD WANTS US TO HAVE FREEDOM,**  
**AND GOD HAS GIVEN US A MEANS TO KNOW TRUE**  
**FREEDOM, BUT NOW IT IS UP TO YOU TO RESPOND TO**  
**GOD.**

**PRAISE GOD.....AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND**  
**FOR ME.....AMEN**