

EXODUS 20:17

(Reading: WSC 79-81; 2 Samuel 11:1-27)

The Tenth Commandment

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

I said before our reading of 2nd Samuel 11 that I would ask the boys and girls a question about the story in that chapter.

Now, I know they can listen really well, sometimes even as good as grownups!

The question I want you to try and answer in your mind, is this: What sin did David do?

Perhaps you're thinking: David took Bathsheba; he stole another man's wife - he went right against the eighth commandment!

What's more, David got her pregnant - he broke the seventh commandment!

Then to avoid any possible scandal David covered it up by having her husband Uriah killed!

That was murder - the sixth commandment!

You know, these are all the outward things; they're what show in action what David did.

But, where did it all begin?

Well, 2nd Samuel 11 begins this story by telling us, "One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace.

"From the roof he saw a woman bathing.

"The woman was very beautiful ... and ... David sent someone to find out about her."

It was coveting that came first!

The tenth commandment is broken.

This sin is really where it all begins - isn't it?

Coveting, though last in the list, is actually the first part of the breakdown in the relationships we have with each other; it's what sets off all those sins the LORD speaks against in the second table of the Law; those commandments about loving your neighbour as yourself.

In fact, I believe God actually placed this command last because it's what we hear last that can often stay with us.

And, if anything, the LORD certainly wants us to see in the first place that... COVETING IS WHERE ALL SIN BEGINS.

Now, this is a high claim!

What goes on in our minds isn't actually what does the damage - or so it seems.

But even in our society this sin is recognised as being what started the wrong.

For example, you might hear or read of when the police are conducting an investigation, that they were seeking a "motive".

In other words, what was the thought the offender had in mind to do that horrific and devastating crime?

In court cases there can be difficulty if a motive cannot be established.

I must say I have found that a bit puzzling on occasion.

Why does there have to be a motive?

There you can have that terrible crime, the evidence is clear about who did it - and they're arguing about a lack of motive!

But it's precisely because of this command!

It's exactly for the reason that every wrong done physically had a mental beginning.

Congregation, wasn't this what caused the fall into sin by our first parents - Adam and Eve?

There we have all the hallmarks of the nature of sin.

The devil tempts the woman.

And he tempts her with something she doesn't have; the old "the grass is greener on the other side" trick.

Then Genesis chapter 3 verse 6 tells us, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

It's not without reason that James in chapter 4 verse 7 of his letter urges us to resist the devil and he will flee from us.

For it's here [point to your head] - in that seducing thought, the subtle temptation - that he plays his wicked game.

As James further explains what then happens, "...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

"Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it's full-grown, gives birth to death." (1:14f)

COVETING IS WHERE ALL SIN BEGINS.

We want what isn't ours.

Just as much as spiritually our rebellion against God means we try to set ourselves up as our own gods, so physically, we're desiring what others are and have as well.

You can read it throughout the pages of Scripture; you'll find it enmeshed in the very fabric of history.

We want what's not ours!

And that goes all the way from childish spats right through to the most destructive World Wars.

Friend, whether you're a member here, or a visitor, maybe you're thinking, "I'm not so bad."

"I haven't done anything like those sins David did - weren't they terrible?"

Well, I have to tell you that there is at least one commandment you haven't kept - this one!

The Lord Jesus clearly showed this in Matthew 5 verse 28.

He said that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Now, reflecting on these words from the Lord makes me think of something which has caused quite a debate amongst young Christian men.

I mean, what's the difference between appreciating God's creation in the body of a young woman or lusting after her?

Tell me - does your look linger?
And what does it linger on?

And it seems this kind of alleged "appreciation" goes right across the board nowadays.

Women begin to speak of men in much the same way that we've seen to be derogatory when men have said it.

Have you heard it?
"Oh, what a ...".

If you can fill in the word, you know what I mean.

If you can't, then let me say that it begins to see men in the same way we've always seen wrong in men treating women as sexual objects; objects of desire.

"Desire" - this is the root word behind "covet".

And as anyone would find as they study the original Hebrew word, desire is not wrong all by itself.

There are obviously a lot of things we have to desire, we should want - like spiritual gifts, for instance.

Desire for food or clothing or housing is nowhere condemned in the Bible and there's no way that's wrong.

What's wrong, though, is **perverted** desire.

What's wrong is wanting the wrong thing, like someone else's spouse.

What's wrong is **excessive** desire - you want to have too much of a good thing!

That's why the word "covet" appears twice in verse 17, it's there not to show it is two commands, but because this one particular commandment impacts on so much of our lives.

For it really does touch our lives in every possible way!

So, as much as coveting is desire gone wrong, **not** coveting is desire going good.

You see, congregation... NOT COVETING IS WHERE SIN BEGINS TO END.

Answer 80 of the Catechism says that positively this commandment means we should have "full contentment with our own condition, and a right and charitable attitude to our neighbour and all that's his."

Take pleasure in what is right.
That's desire too.

But it's far from wanting what we don't have!

In fact, not coveting is being supremely happy with what you **do** have!

Now, I do have to say that this flies directly in the face of much of the world today.

We live in such a materialistic, self-indulgent, itching generation, that the simple advice to be happy with what you've got just doesn't go down!

The modern gurus - whether they be in astrology, counselling, popular magazines and newspapers - talk about self-fulfilment in such a way that you've just got to have it, and you sure ain't got it now!

There are even so-called evangelists, filling our early hour television screens, who carry on about making faith work for **you**.

The television commercials just keep going on and on about indulging **yourself**.

Out there they just want MORE and MORE and MORE!

Get me a better deal, a new package, the latest fashion, the greatest gadgets, or even...A NEW CAR!

COME ON DOWN!

Ah, the appeal of the T.V. gameshow.

That's all filling our minds with the wrong desire.

That's not being **content**.

Congregation, that's really what the tenth commandment is all about... contentment.

It was Martin Luther who aptly said, "You can't stop the birds flying over your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair!"

Dear friend, let me ask you personally - are you happy?

Has the Christian life been for you a fresh start; a real relief from the rat race out there?

Or is out there still holding on **in here**?

You know that's where you're unhappy, if you are unhappy at the moment.

Somehow you have this terrible itch.

And you just can't seem to get rid of it!

You try to scratch it, but that just opens it up all over again.

You know you shouldn't scratch it; you know it will go away if you can only leave it alone.

That's exactly what Paul described in Romans 7 verse 15.

There he said, "I don't understand what I do. For what I want to do I don't do, but what I hate I do."
(Rom.7:15)

Yet it was the same man who could later say, in Philippians 4 verses 11 and 12, "...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

What's the difference?

Jesus Christ - He's the difference!

As Paul goes on to say, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil.4:13)

Now, don't think Paul has gone all stiff upper lip, and is trying to deny what he's really like.

He hasn't become some hermit denying his physical needs altogether.

But in his heart he's living out that new start.

For knowing the love of Christ is the one and only source from which true contentment ever flows.

Hebrews 13 verses 5 and 6 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I won't be afraid.

"What can man do to me?'" (v5f)

That's the Spirit - the Holy Spirit!

Realising God's own presence - the God whose planned out your life and gives you the strength to cope with your life - He's the secret to a happy life.

You see, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "...godliness with contentment **is** great gain.

"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

"But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that.

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." (1 Tim.6:6ff)

Dear friend, what is that you're wanting?

Even right now - what's really the love on your heart?

You see, we can hide under that veneer of church respectability, we can kind've kid ourselves that coming here gives us credit, but for what?

The LORD can see right through you!

Nothing is hidden from His sight!

So **live** in His **light**!

As that old devil comes a-visiting, trying that same old line which has sold you a dummy every time, you tell him to go away.

When that temptation pops up, you call it for what it is.

Follow your Lord Jesus who drew on God's Word, to go the right way.

For each of those three temptations Satan tried in Matthew 4, Christ's response always came back to God's Word - and we must do the same!

NOT COVETING IS WHERE SIN BEGINS TO END.

And when sin has completely ended, believer, then He who is our Supreme Desire, Jesus the Joy of loving hearts, He will have come and delivered us **forever** from all that has ever come between.

Let's look forward to that time; and let's live preparing for that time - the time in which our lifetime here is but a tiny dot on God's time line.

What a future that will be!

Then we'll have all the right things - eternally!

AMEN.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Jesus, our Saviour and our Lord, do so use these words - Your Word - to grip our hearts, and to set them on fire for You.

May it be that in every way - every day - and wherever we are, we are living for You.

Keep us always praying to You - because we want so much to be with You by Your Spirit - and so become more and more like You.

O Lord, may we soon reach the goal You have for us, the perfection which awaits all Your people in glory!

For Your Name's Sake, we plead, Amen.

