



# FIRST PRESS

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 43

FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 2014

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Aug. 10, 9 a.m.**

Sunday School in the Pastor's Study: "The Tenth Commandment"

**Aug. 10, 10 a.m.**

Morning Worship: Luke 15:11-24, "Two Lost Sons (Part II)"

**Sept. 3, 5:15 p.m.**

Midweek Bible Study, "What Do Presbyterians Believe About God's Covenant with Man?"

## From the Pastor's Pen...

We are wrapping up our study of the Ten Commandments in Sunday school and will begin a new phase in the life of Israel in the Wilderness. The Ten Commandments are found in Exod. 20 and the next several chapters consist of exposition of those commands.

Since we have spent so many weeks applying each of the Commandments in turn, we will focus our attention on the preparations for the Tabernacle and ultimately Israel's entry into the Promised Land. God redeemed His people from slavery so that they could serve Him and so that He could dwell in their midst in His Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was a beautiful and ornate tent where the priests would serve Him on behalf of the people and where God's glorious presence was visibly centered.

In the Tabernacle there is a remarkable picture of God graciously dwelling with His people as they journeyed through the Sinai desert.

While in the wilderness (i.e. desert), all Israel lived in tents. While His people lived in tents, God was pleased to live in a tent as well; though it is specifically called the Tabernacle, it was fundamentally a tent.

God gave Moses very specific directions for the construction and furnishing of that tent. The Tabernacle was to be a replica, a copy of the eternal altar in heaven and the sacrifices that would be offered in that tent were designed to direct the people forward to the one sacrifice of the Messiah who was made known as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:19-20).

The sacrifices offered there did not take away sin, but made the people aware of the need of a sacrifice for sin and what every sin deserves: death. As such, everything about the Tabernacle was to teach Israel about Christ and His ministry for them and for us as well.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

After a few weeks of introduction on the Ten Commandments, the Catechism is now looking at the preface to the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20:2. Many of us might be tempted to breeze right through the preface, but it actually gives us some very important insight into the nature of God's Law.

Q43. *What is the preface to the ten commandments?*

**A. The preface to the ten commandments is in these words, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."**

The preface of the Ten Commandments gives us the context for when the Law of God was given. It was not, as it says, given to Israel in Egypt, but rather was given *after* God had already redeemed and saved them from their Egyptian overlords.

God did *not* give His Law to His people in order to *earn* their salvation by keeping it, but

rather to teach them how to live as his people. As He gives the Law, He reminds them of who He is (the Lord) and what He has done for them (redeem them from slavery).

This is, as we continue to see, quite different from the popular perception of God and how He relates to His people. People often think God loves those who are good and who do His commands and rewards them accordingly.

But the consistent testimony of the Scripture is that God loves people *before* they obey His commands; God saves people *before* they keep His Law. God's Law is not the way we can be saved or enter into a relationship with Him.

God's Law is given to His people *after* He has redeemed and saved them to teach Israel how they are to live as *His* people. It is the same for us; Christ did not die for His people because they kept the Law, He died for lawbreakers and sends His Spirit to transform sinners into those who love the Law of God (cf. Psalm 119).



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# The Mission of the Church

All institutions have a purpose and a mission; whether it be the VFW, the Boy Scouts, or the Congress of the United States. First Presbyterian Church, like any other institution, has a mission and a purpose. Our purpose, however, is different from every other institution. The Church is not a human institution, it is not a civic group. As such, it is not run according to man-made principles and preferences, but according to the dictates of her King, the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only head of the Church.

Since the church belongs to Christ, we who are members of His church and citizens of His Kingdom do not have the prerogative or right to do whatever we want or think is best with the church. Instead, we must look to God's word to tell us what we are to do as a congregation and how we are to worship Him.

Christ gave the church one mission, the *Great Commission* and it is recorded in Matt. 28:18ff: ***'And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'***

This commission from Christ the King is our charter, our mission statement; the commission from the King defines our mandate. ***Everything that we do as a church must be in some way aimed at fulfilling that command.***

The commission Christ gave to His Church is not an easy one. In fact, throughout history, many have abandoned that commission in favor of other endeavors. Such organizations often grow by leaps and bounds, attracting many followers because the results are quick, tangible, and easy to quantify.

The work of the Church, however, is slow, laborious, and often difficult to gage. Moreover, every aspect of the mission is entirely dependant on God's Spirit to accomplish anything. Let's look at three aspects of the command:

**1. Go...** To obey, to fulfill the command of Christ, we have to get out of our "comfort zone" and talk of Him, tell of Him to new people who don't know him, who aren't "like us," and who may not be all that interested.

**2. Make disciples...baptizing them...** The purpose of this "going" is to convert sinners from followers of sin to followers of Christ. We aren't supposed to simply get people to sign pledge cards or dunk them in water, we are to *disciple* them, train them to follow after Christ.

**3. Teaching them to observe...** This is even more unpopular and difficult. It's not simply that we baptize them and make them into followers, we have to train them, teach them, and equip them with Christ's own commands and teachings to show them how to live as His people.

We in the church are to proclaim a way of life that is profoundly different from and hostile to the ways of the world. The world will not like our message, but it is a message from Christ to save people from the world.

## Sermon Snapshot: "Conversion: Faith and Repentance"

This past Lord's Day we looked at the first part of the parable commonly called "The Prodigal Son" found in Luke 15:11-32. The parable that Jesus tells is not just about one of the sons, but both of them and their gracious father's patience with their respective sins. This week we looked at the younger son who gets his inheritance early and fritters it away on "riotous living" (you can imagine what an 18 year old with a fortune would do!).

The foolish lad wanted nothing to do with his father, a father whom Jesus portrays as one who clearly loved both of his sons deeply. Instead, he only had use for his father so long as it suited his own pleasure, and once he had his inheritance, he treated his father as though he were dead.

As you can imagine, he "lived it up" for a while. Jesus doesn't tell us how long his fortune and spending spree lasted, but long enough. He had partied hard and amassed to himself a lot of companions to share in his wealth; one thinks of the tabloid headlines a few years ago reporting Prince Harry's trip to Las Vegas prior to his deployment to Afghanistan.

Of course, the lad runs out of money and, as Providence had ordered it, there is a famine in the land. He is forced to hire himself out to a pig farmer slopping the swine. He is truly in a pathetic position: starving as he toils to feed hogs.

Jesus tells us that the prodigal eventually "came to himself" and realized what fool he had been. In this episode, Christ gives us a beautiful and vivid picture of what true

conversion, that is *faith* and *repentance*, looks like:

The man recognizes his sinful state and complete destitution. He embraces the truly gracious character of his father. He confesses his sin and he abandons his lifestyle of sin.

The lad left his father's house thinking he had no need of "the old man," but he realized what a fool he had been and comes to terms with the fact that his father's mercy and kindness is his only hope.

That is precisely how conversion works. All of us have gone astray, and blessed is the one who realizes that in going astray, we bring death to ourselves because we have abandoned the God who truly loves sinners, who forgives sinners who come to Him seeking grace.



What is the gospel?  
& why does it matter?

Join us!  
Starting June 1  
Sundays @ 10:00 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church  
302 Summit Street | Winona, Miss.