

By Terry Stefaniuk

The Ten Commandments, given to Moses on Mount Sinai in the Old Testament Book of Exodus, related a series of "Thou shalt not" phrases."



Are they seen as a set of laws, which are indisputable, or rules by which we must live? Can you imagine the Father looking at you with a rather stern face delivering these to you?

Should we fail to live by them, then what? Are we destined for sure failure? Are we doomed as individuals? Are we a people without a future?

How are the Ten Commandments perceived today? Are they prescriptive telling us what we can and cannot do? Might some say they are limiting?

A look at our world suggests that many are not concerned by or with the Ten Commandments. The news is filled with commentary about how they are being broken.

: Gang battles in our cities, large and small

: Battles on the playground; some call it bullying

: Wars in the Middle East the birth place of Christianity. How does that make sense?

: Battles over relationships between us as individuals, between groups of people be it race, ethnic groups, cultures, and religions; Residential Schools, Israelis and Palestinians, Muslim ban

So much.... Where is the responsibility and truth in all of this?

Truth... What is it today? Does it involve being honest to what actually is? The sky is blue; the grass is green? Or does it become the narrative that we want it to be? The truth is as "I" see it. And that is the truth. Everything else is false because it is not how "I" see it. Everything else is wrong therefore it is a lie. "I" am the truth.

The last phrase 'I am the truth'. Have we not heard that before? "Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6 (NIV)

There is another truth,...a truth that some ignore, "God spoke" to all the people the words of the covenant, that is, the "ten commandments".

Is it too much to ask in today's world for us to live into these? Would that be easier than living up to them?

Are we a failing people? Am I a failure?

Has our world gone so far that there no longer is hope? Is it too much to ask for a little help here?

I would say it is not too much to ask for a little help. There is much upon which to draw.

There is hope... There is joy amongst the hardship. But where is it to be found?

In Matthew 27:46 during his darkest hour Jesus said, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Of what purpose was this suffering? It was for the redemption of our sin, our on-going sin as people on earth.

Is that it... we are forgiven our sins because Jesus paid the price. He paid the ultimate price so we could go on living.

Where does that leave us?

Where do we go from here?

Is there anywhere to go from here?

There is hope. There is blessing. But what is the blessing when we see darkness. What we know seems to be crumbling down around us. Events seem to conspire against us. How am I to see a blessing? I'm unemployed... My family is breaking apart... drugs... alcohol... sickness... Nobody cares... It's all me, me, me. The rich just want more... More profits... They call it finding efficiencies... I call it getting fired... greater profits and lower taxes means creating more jobs... What a crock... the have... who are they?... I'm not one... What do I have?... Yah well... and you want me to follow the Ten Commandments.

Ten Commandments don't put food on the table. They don't feed my kids.

So where is that hope when others just seem to pile more upon me? I follow the rules, the laws, the commandments the best I can and what do I get for it? What does my family get?

How and where can hope be found? Where are the blessings? To what can I hold fast? Where is the support? I need a rock or strength... I need pillars to support me... to surround me with their strength. Oh and maybe some love. I need some blessings... You know those things they talk about in church. Blessings... you know those things that make a person happy and content.

Yah, yah, yah...make it on your own says the world or else there ain't nothin' for you here.

Well there is something...It's been here the whole time. Can you not see it? Come on sure you can...Those Ten Commandments are strong and clear. My conscience is strong and clear when I follow them. But what about that food on the table? What about that job I need?

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[a]? (Matthew 6 25-27)

That's what the Bible says. So where is it that I can find those blessings? Remember I'm poor. I'm not strong...My family is hungry...Oh there is so much fighting, my heart is longing for peace...Where is the blessing? ...Where is the reward? ... I try to keep a pure heart but it is difficult. Where shall I turn?

I'm back to those commandments. They seem somewhat solid and strong. They're holding up under heavy attack. They have yet to completely crumble. They are standing? ... Right?

But my attitude is still under attack from within and by the world. It must be my attitude...

It is ... Beatitudes....You know those things in Matthew. Not my son Matthew. Although I hope he has them. The other one. You know Matthew 5: 1-12...The beatitudes, those ones from the Sermon on the Mount. The ones with blessings. They tell us we are blessed.

They are not crumbling. Even though the world may be chipping away at me, I can go back to these and find strength...and hope...and blessing....And most of all that I am one of His beloved.

Jesus gave us the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. They are recorded for us in the Gospel of Matthew the first book of the New Testament. This gospel was directed to an audience strong in the Hebrew tradition.

“So that brings us to the present lesson, from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus saw the crowds coming to Him, so He went up on a mountainside and sat down, the well-known posture of the teacher. The traditional location of this “mount” is the low hills behind the region of Capernaum and the other fishing villages on the shore. His disciples came to Him, and so Jesus began to teach them.

This is the first and longest message of Jesus that we have in the gospel. Jesus had been announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and He had been calling for people to repent. Now, in what has been described as the manifesto of His kingdom, Jesus unveils the foundations and character of life in that kingdom. Here He teaches the ethical guidelines for life in His kingdom; and the guidelines point to the quality of righteousness that characterizes life in the kingdom, now in part, but fully in the future.”

<https://bible.org/seriespage/7-beatitudes-matthew-51-12>

In contrast to the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes bring a message of humility, charity, and brotherly love. Jesus teaches transformation of the inner person. The Beatitudes are presented in an uplifting manner, virtues in life which will ultimately lead to reward.

“While the Beatitudes of Jesus provide a way of life that promises salvation, they also provide peace in the midst of our trials and tribulations on this earth.

An early contemplation on the Beatitudes came from St. Gregory of Nyssa, a mystic who lived in Cappadocia in Asia Minor around 380 AD. He described the Beatitudes this way:

"Beatitude is a possession of all things held to be good,
from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want.
Perhaps the meaning of beatitude may become clearer to us
if it is compared with its opposite.
Now the opposite of beatitude is misery.
Misery means being afflicted unwillingly with painful sufferings."

<http://www.jesuschristsavior.net/Beatitudes.html>

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, ²and He began to teach them, saying:

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your

reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/7-beatitudes-matthew-51-12>

We are a blessed people. Look around you. Look at life here in this place. In this place in Osler ...and area; In Saskatoon; Here in Canada...Yes there is hardship...But there is joy and reason to rejoice.

We are a blessed people for we have the ability to help each other. Were you at the MCC Relief Sale? Have you been to Friendship Inn? Are you involved in the community garden? Maybe you are involved with the refugee process?

We are a blessed people for we have shoulders and arms to hold each other up. We are a blessed people as we take the time to listen to those around us.

We are a blessed people for we can worship in freedom... without fear of persecution. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.

The world can be a difficult and hard place...But the richness of the reward is immeasurable. Remember when you succeeded at something for the first time. Maybe you saw a baby take their first step or those tentative first pedals on a bicycle without training wheels. What joy filled your heart?

The pillars of scripture surround us and bring us peace. It is in the Beatitudes. Use them to hold each other up. Walk amongst the columns of the Ten Commandments. Let them be your guide. At times we may stumble on the cobblestones of the path. The path is not always smooth. If it was... when would we know that we were experiencing joy?

It is a journey of immense richness. The sun will come out and let its light shine and so to should ours. Let us share it together.

Amen