

Series: Exodus

Title: Gospel: Command and Promise

Text: Exodus 23: 20-33

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The two messages the Lord has given me for today teach us the same truth: the gospel is not an offer but a command. The first message was from the new testament titled “Gospel: Command or Offer?” This second message is from the old testament. Yet the truth is the same: the gospel is a command. Paul gave the first text, this second by Moses. Both declare the gospel is not an offer but a command to obey the Lord Jesus Christ by believing and following him.

Title: Gospel: Command and Promise

Through his prophet Moses, God gave the children of Israel his gospel command.

Exodus 23: 20: Behold, I send an Angel before thee,...

This Angel is Christ. Paul said, *1 Corinthians 10: 9: Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* Christ has always been God's messenger. He has always been the Angel of the covenant! Christ has always been the Redeemer of God's elect, the Redeemer of God's true Israel, even before his incarnation. He is “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (*Rev 13: 8*).

We know this Angel is Christ because only Christ does what this Angel was sent to do: **Exodus 23: 20: Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.**

Now, here is the gospel command—**Exodus 23: 21: Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.**

“Beware of him” means fear him, reverence Christ. “Obey his voice” means believe on Christ and follow him. “Provoke him not” means do not cease fearing and believing him. “For he will not pardon your transgressions”—only God can pardon transgressions and Christ is God; so this Angel is God. Here is why Christ will not pardon transgressions, the Father says, “For my name is in him.” It means Christ and God the Father are one; Christ is the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Now, does that sound like an offer? No. It is not an offer; it is a command.

Here is God's promise in Christ—**Exodus 23: 22: But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.**

Proposition: The gospel is a command to believe on Christ and all the promises of God given the believer are given freely in and by Christ.

THE GOSPEL COMMAND IS FOR OUR OWN GOOD

Exodus 23: 20: Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

Christ the Angel went before political Israel. He kept them in that physical way. Christ led them to that physical promised land which God prepared for them. But that pictures how Christ is the Forerunner who goes before God's elect Israel, to keep us in the spiritual Way, to make sure all God's elect enter into God's eternal promised land.

God's elect are called to obey the gospel command because Christ went *before us*. He is our Forerunner.

Christ went before us under the law all the way to the cross. So we who obey the command to believe on Christ have already obeyed the law. We have already been judged by God for our transgressions. “*I am crucified with Christ,*” said the apostle Paul. That is what all true believers can say. Our judgment has been settled at Calvary.

Christ went before us to the grave. All God's elect have already died in Christ. That is why we have this good news, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15: 55-57). Christ promises, “Whosoever believeth in me shall never die” (Jn 11: 26).

Christ went before us within the veil into God's holy presence. So our hope is in Christ, our Forerunner, that we, too, shall enter in. The Hebrew writer said, “Hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 6: 19-20)

We are called to obey the gospel command because Christ himself is the Way in which he keeps us. He said, “I am the Way...no man comes to the Father but by me” (Jn 14: 6). Christ keeps each believer from looking for Righteousness another way—Christ is the Way. Christ keeps us from looking for Holiness another way—Christ is the Way. Christ keeps us from

looking for acceptance with God another way—Christ is the Way. Christ is the Way to God and Christ goes before us to keep us in the Way. Therefore, none of his sheep shall stray out of the Way!

We are called to obey the gospel command because Christ himself prepared the place for us. As Christ went to the cross, he said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also” (Jn 14: 2-3). Christ would not lie to his people. He would not suffer the ignominious death of the cross to prepare a dwelling place for us then not come again to receive us to himself. He will have each of redeemed to be with him where he is. Once he has come and received us to himself, he will keep us in him so that we get to that place he prepared for us. It is a place prepared by our heavenly Father from the foundation of the world in that God the Father chose Christ to be our Head and Representative. Therefore, Christ said in that great day of judgment, “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Mt 25: 34) Believers follow Christ through this world because we “desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb 11: 16). Preacher, what it is like there with Christ in that promised land? I don’t know because “as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor 2: 9).

Do you see that the gospel is a command to obey Christ for our own good? Christ is our Salvation!

THE GOSPEL COMMAND

Let’s look at each part of this gospel command.

First, God commands us to fear the Lord Jesus Christ—Exodus 23: 21: Beware of him... Scripture tells us “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding” (Pr 9:10). When God gives us a holy reverence for Christ then Christ becomes Wisdom unto us. That is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of THE HOLY—CHRIST JESUS—is understanding.

Where God gives fear, God commands us to obey Christ—Ex 23: 21: **and obey his voice...**The gospel command is to believe on Christ and follow him. We are to obey his voice, his command, his gospel, by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith casts all our care on Christ. Faith rests entirely in Christ for he is Salvation. Christ is everything we need for acceptance with our holy and righteous God.

Also, God commands us—Exodus 23: 21: **provoke him not.** Do not provoke Christ by not fearing him. Do not provoke Christ by refusing to believe on him. Do not provoke Christ by seeking some other way. If the children of Israel ceased following the Angel and tried to find the promised land themselves by going some other way, they would have provoked Christ the Angel by their lack of reverence and by not believing and following him. So would we!

Do you see that the gospel is a command, not an offer? God did not offer Israel an invitation to follow Christ through the wilderness. It was a command. The gospel is command to us to obey Christ by reverencing and believing on him.

THE NEGATIVE PROMISE IN CHRIST

Exodus 23: 21:...he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name *is* in him.

If any disobey this gospel command, God promises Christ will not pardon your transgressions.

Indeed, our transgressions include every law of God which we have all broken in Adam and by our personal disobedience. If we reject Christ as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption then we have no more sacrifice for our sins. Christ is the only Way of forgiveness with God. Reject Christ and he will not pardon your transgressions.

But God is speaking of transgressing God the Father’s gospel command by not obeying Christ’s command. God the Father sent Christ to be the Prophet of his people. The Father said of Christ, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto [Moses], and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deu 18:18). Therefore, Christ said, “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me (Jn 14: 24). Therefore, the apostle John says, “This is his commandment [God the Father’s] that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he [Christ] gave us commandment.” (1 Jn 3:23)

Since rejecting Christ’s command is to reject the Father’s command, God declares Christ will not pardon your transgressions “*for my name is in him.*” God’s name is in Christ alone. What does that mean? “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). Christ is the “brightness of his glory and the express image of his person” (Heb 1: 3) God the Father and Christ his Son are one name! Christ said, “I and my Father are one” (Jn 10: 30)! Christ said,

John 5:43 I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

John 10:25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.

John 5:23: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

Therefore, if any will not obey Christ's gospel command then they are disobeying God the Father's gospel command! So God says, *"he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him."* To reject the gospel command—to reject Christ—is the ultimate transgression and Christ will not pardon it. Christ said when the Comforter is come, he will convince his people of our sin. And what is that sin? "Of sin, because they believe not on me" (Jn 16:9) Christ said of himself, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn 3: 18)

THE POSITIVE PROMISES IN CHRIST

Exodus 23: 22: But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. 23: For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off. 24: Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. 25: And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. 26: There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil. 27: I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. 28: And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. 29: I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. 30: By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. 31: And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. 32: Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. 33: They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

For those who obey the gospel command by obeying Christ's Voice, that is, by believing on Christ and following him, God gives these promises in Christ. Concerning our enemies, God promises *"I will cut them off."* These enemy nations picture the sins of our flesh. By keeping the law as our Representative and by fulfilling the law as our Substitute, Christ has cut off all our sins before the law making us righteous in him. So God gives grace in Christ in regeneration to believe on Christ and Christ keeps us so that his commands becomes promises of grace to us.

This command is a promise of grace to all who obey the gospel by resting in Christ by faith. God promises every believer, *"Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images."* Christ keeps those who believe on him from bowing down to idol gods. Christ gives us grace to reject them. So this is a promise of God in Christ to the believer.

To all that obey the gospel command by God's grace, God gives more grace making us serve only Christ by whom we are made fruitful. Christ produces all our fruit. The apostle Paul called them "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ" (Php 1: 11) By Christ producing the fruit of faith in us God promises, *"Ye shall serve the LORD your God."* God promises, *"He shall bless thy bread and thy water"*—that is, Christ blesses the gospel of Christ our Bread and Water unto us so that we shall never hunger or thirst through faith in him. All our fruit, personally, is of Christ. Plus, Christ blesses the gospel we preach making his church bear fruit in the form of sons and daughters that the Spirit quickens, that Christ brings to obey the gospel command to believe on him. God promises, *"The number of thy days I will fulfill"*—meaning God shall keep the believer all our days and gives us eternal life in Christ in the end.

God promises to increase fear in our hearts—*"I will send my fear before thee."* By this he makes us look to Christ alone. By this, Christ subdues our sinful flesh—*"I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs on thee."* Remember, the enemies pictured here are the sins of our sin-nature. By forming Christ in our inward man, God gives fear of the LORD in the inward man and he increases that fear. Christ in the inward man subdues our sinful flesh throughout our lives so that sin does not have dominion over you for you are not under the law but under grace;

God promises *"And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee."* God literally drove out those nations using hornets. But the word for "hornet" is "a sting, a scourge, leprosy." Christ sends a stinging death—a scourge—to the sin that condemned us. Christ crucified our old man of sin in him when he was crucified. Therefore, the gospel declares *"Christ condemned sin in the flesh"* (Rom 8:3) Like the hornet drove out the enemies in Canaan, Christ gave a stinging death to the sin that made us die so that sin is now condemned. Our sin can no longer kill us because Christ killed our sin. As we hear how Christ *brought* death to our sins, Christ *brings* death to our sinful flesh. He makes the believer treat our old man of sin as what it really is: crucified with Christ. "Mortify" means to treat as dead. By the gospel which declares Christ condemned sin in the flesh, Christ makes us treat our old sinful flesh as dead because in Christ it is! Do you see how the hornets driving out those enemy nations pictures Christ bringing death to our sinful flesh? I hope that is clear.

But watch this. God promises, *"I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee."* Christ could easily give us complete victory over our sinful flesh. But we would

not depend upon Christ and the devil would win the victory. So God leaves us in this sinful flesh to keep us constantly depending upon Christ.

Therefore, God promises, *“By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.”* Believer, we are as holy as we will ever be when we are born-again. The Holy Spirit creates a new holy man within us. That new man is created in the holiness and righteousness of Christ. But God *“increases us”* in the grace and knowledge of Christ in the inward man. We do not become less and less sinful. Oh, we may appear to walk in a more Christ-honoring way before men, and we should. But the more Light we are given the more we see sins in ourselves that no one else sees. We see sins of our heart, sins of thought. Thereby, Christ makes us depend more upon him and less upon ourselves. Thus, he mortifies our sinful flesh little by little. He does it, not by making us more holy, but by making us see what Christ accomplished on the cross for us. He does this by making us seek Christ above where our lives are hid. That is how Christ makes us treat our old man of sin as dead, crucified with Christ. But we will have this sinful flesh to contend with *“until thou inherit the land”*—until he brings us to that hour when we drop this body of death and Christ gives us our eternal inheritance in glory.

Still, until that day, Christ has the dominion over us and in us. He promises us that sin shall not have the dominion over us because *“I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.”* The point is Christ sets the bounds of our sinful flesh. He is our Strength. Christ subdues our sinful flesh. As Paul said, *“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord”* (Rom 7: 24-25). Therefore, we never become independent. He makes us abide in Christ constantly for without him we can do nothing; Christ is our Strength.

God give us grace to obey the gospel command to fear Christ, obey Christ by faith, and provoke him not but rather trust him for all!

Amen!