

Putting the First Thing First

Exodus 20:1-3

Good morning! Welcome to Fil-Am Church. Whether you're watching us live in-person or you're on FB Live, we welcome you.

Today, we're starting a new series I'm calling "Living a Fulfilled Life". It's actually a series on the Ten Commandments. Guess how many parts this series has? So, for the next ten weeks we're going to look at these commandments or laws that God has given to his children the Israelites in the Old Testament. We're going to apply them in our modern lives and see how it can help us to find fulfillment in our lives.

Someone may say, "But, pastor, isn't that being legalistic? Are we supposed to follow rules? I'm a Christian, anyway, and Jesus has already set me free from rules."

You're right. Jesus said we are no longer bound by rules. Rules cannot save us. Any of these 10 commandments cannot and will not earn us a ticket to heaven. It's just impossible. God didn't design in that way. What are these rules then for?

First, to point us to Jesus. The Bible says in Gal. 3:24 (NASB), "Therefore the Law has become our guardian to lead us to Christ." When we realize that we cannot keep these 10 rules perfectly, then we'll surrender our lives to the one who has kept them perfectly. Jesus fulfilled them for us because we cannot fulfill them ourselves. He says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17-18) When did he fulfill them? First by not breaking any of them when he was living on earth and second, when he died on the cross. He sealed the deal. He said, "It is finished".

Now, what is this law that Jesus was referring to? He was talking about the Mosaic Law, the 10 commandments and all the ceremonial and civil and moral rules that God gave Israel through Moses. We are no longer under this law especially the ceremonial and civil rules, but our lives are still guided by the 10 commandments. How is that? Because these 10 commandments or rules regulate our relationships. God gave them to help us to improve our relationship with God and with others. The first four rules regulate our relationship with God and the next six regulate our relationship with others. And Jesus emphasized that when he quoted from the Old Testament as read earlier by Joseph.

And so, the ten commandments are there, first, to point us to Jesus and second, to regulate our relationships. Note that God's motive in giving us these commandments is love. He wants us to acknowledge what Jesus has done for us because we are so sinful that we cannot keep these commandments. And when we do that and we are saved, our motive in keeping these commandments should be love as well. In doing so, we fulfill the law. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). And in Galatians 5:14, "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

So, first Jesus fulfilled the law for us by dying for us because he loves us. Then, second, we fulfill the law by loving others because we love Jesus. Does that make sense? In all these, God initiated everything. We respond. Isn't it just right and proper then that we put God first in our lives?

And so, I have entitled this message, "Putting the First Thing First". And that first thing is putting God above everything else. Let's look at Exodus 20:1-3, "And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 'You shall have no other gods before me.'"

That's the first of the 10 commandments. That's the first step to living a fulfilled life. God gave the first commandment because this is the most important. He says you shall have no other gods before me. **What the principle do we derive from this?** The principle is this. **God gets first place in my life.** That's the principle. God gets first place. He's not going to play second fiddle to anything. He deserves top priority. He doesn't want any competition. He doesn't want any rivals.

Now how do you define God? What is a god? A god is anything that has first place in your life. For many people their god is their house or their job or their career or their reputation or anything that takes first place in their life. That becomes their god. Everybody has a god. It's just who or what that god is. It may be themselves. And every man has a god. Even an atheist has a god.

God says, "You shall have no other gods before me." He is saying, "I don't want anybody before me". Jesus said, no man can serve two masters. He didn't say you shouldn't serve two masters, he said you can't serve two masters. You're going to have tension and anxiety if you do. Now the fact is, you and I are going to serve somebody in life, like Bob Dylan sang in the song, "You're Going to Have to Serve Somebody". So what is the key to a fulfilled life? The key to a fulfilled life is to choose the best master. Let God be God in your life. Choose the master who is going to be for your benefit. You're going to serve somebody. People say, you know, I take drugs, no they take you. You see, we're going to be controlled by something in life. Let God control you. So, choose somebody who has your best interests at heart. Choose someone who can give you a fulfilled life.

God gets first place in my life. That's the principle we learn from the first commandment. Now, **What promise does it hold for me? God takes care of me.** Let's read this verse together. From **Matthew 6:33, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."**

Folks, when you have an insurance policy that covers a hundred percent coverage, that's good news. This verse says, when you seek first God's kingdom, everything in your life will be taken care of by God. Now, what's the context of this? Well, Jesus was talking about worry. Why? Because one of the ways you can know that God is first place in your life is, Do I worry? If you worry it means something else is taking first priority in your life. If you're not worrying it means most likely God has taken that proper place. But God says don't worry. Instead, he says, *"Seek first my kingdom and all these other things will be given to you as well."* He is saying "I'm taking total care of you. I've got you covered."

So, we see that we need to put God first in our lives so that we don't have to worry. He is our priority. He takes precedence over anything else in our lives. Then, he blesses us. The question now is,

What procedure should I follow? How do I make God first place in my life? Practically speaking, if you say, put him first place in your life, how do you do that? Where do I put God first in my life? Well, anywhere you want God to bless. Now, I want to talk to you just real quickly about five ways that God wants to be first place in your life. **Five areas he wants to have top priority.**

Number 1, **Put God first place in your finances.** Let's read Proverbs 3:9 and 10 together. *"Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your crops. Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine."* That's the promise. God says I want to be first in your finances. Why? Because folks, how you spend your money really reveals what's important. Do you want to know what your priorities are? Check your checkbook.

Now, in this church we believe in tithing. If you've taken Class 201, we teach that the tithe represents 10% of your income. That was the biblical standard in the Old Testament. I believe that it continues through the New Testament. I know that this is a debatable subject among Christians.

Sometimes it can even be a debate between spouses. I have a friend years ago who lamented the fact that he couldn't give the full 10% of his income because his wife was against it. Sometimes they quarrel because of it. His wife is not a Christian. I told him that what's more important than the tithe is their marriage. God is more interested in preserving a marriage than in receiving the tithe. So, I don't care how much tithe you give. But one thing I want you to see is that the purpose of tithing is to teach you to put God first in your lives. Why does God want us to return ten percent back to him? Because God wants what your money represents. He wants you. God doesn't need your money. Tithing is just a reminder to us that he wants to be first place in your life. And if God is first in your finances, most likely he's first in your life.

Number 2, **put God first in your interests.** I think that includes your careers, your hobbies, your recreation. You know, you can tell a lot about a person by what they get excited over. Have you noticed that? We get excited over what's important. Like the football season is about to start and the men are starting to get excited. Or there's a new iPad model and many Apple fans are getting excited. Now, there's no problem about getting excited over things. But we have to compare this excitement with our excitement about God. Are we more excited about learning more about God and being closer to God or obeying God more than we're excited about all other things? If the reverse is true, then we have a problem. It just shows that God is not first place in our lives.

Two ladies were talking on the phone one day, and the one said to the other, "Did you see Kathy's new suit on Sunday?" "No, I didn't." "Did you see Helen's new dress?" "No." "Well, did you see Madge's new hat?" "No." "Well surely you saw Connie's new coat." "No." She said, "A lot of good it does you to go to church!"

When we say putting God first in our interests, it means spending more time with God in prayer rather than spending time talking about other people. It means reading and studying the Bible more than surfing the internet or watching TikTok. It means ministering to people's needs more than thinking of what I need.

What are you most interested in? That's your God. And God says, I don't want any god before me. No competition. No rivals. I want to be first in your interests. Look at this verse. *"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."* (Col. 3:2) That's a surefire way of putting God first in your interests. If your focus is on things that have eternal value, then that means your interest is in God. The reverse is true. If you're more focused on amassing wealth, trying to be good in the eyes of others, then you must have forgotten God.

Number 3, *put God first in your relationships*. Folks, if God is going to have first place in your life, then you're going to have to choose your friends carefully. Proverbs 12:26, says, *"The righteous choose their friends carefully."* How many of you would agree that some relationships are just dead wrong? You know it. And it's like Samson playing with fire. How close to the fire can I get and not be burned? How close to the edge of the cliff can I get and not fall off? And maybe you got a relationship that you're just kind of teasing around, especially if you're married, but you know it's wrong. The Bible says, *"Bad company corrupts good character."* (1 Cor. 15:33) I think that includes your dating relationship. Don't take the chance. Don't risk it. I know God is gracious and he can change hearts. But he didn't promise he will. I have a friend who dated an unbeliever, got pregnant, and found out the guy is married. Another friend married an unbeliever and said it was hard going to church alone.

Put him first in your relationships.

Number 4, *Put God first in your schedule*.

You know, I ran across a verse yesterday that I had decided describes the life of the majority of people who live in the Metro DC area. You might want to write this down. You can share it with a friend. Exodus 18:13. Some of you, this is your life verse. This describes your life. Exodus 18:13. You could say I found my life verse in the Bible. You want to hear it? *“The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening.”* How many of you, that's your life verse? We know we can get so busy that we forget God. We get so caught up in activities. And all of the things, ball games and budgets and buildings and careers and you know all of these kinds of things, taxes and sports and dance class, all of these things that you get into your life. It's so easy to forget God. Now some of you may have said, “Wait a minute, Pastor Rolly, don't come down on me. I'm in church every Sunday. Week after week. And I attend a home group once a week.” And I say fantastic. I think that's great. But what if you husbands, you came to your wife today after church and you said, honey, I promise that from now on I will be faithful to you one day a week? You can count it, I'm going to be loyal, I'm going to be trustworthy, true blue, faithful, every Monday. Partial faithfulness is no faithfulness at all. It's like you say, “Lord, I'll give you a day of the week.” Well sure, that's great. But God says, “I want to be a part of your schedule”. Now how do you do that in a practical way? You know, we're so busy, we have so many things going on. We got so many irons in the fire.

How do you think you're going to put God first in your schedule? The solution is to make appointments. Make appointments with God. Just like pencil it in on your calendar. Make appointments with God just like you make appointments with anybody else. You know, seal in a date and dates need to be split up. And you establish the regular habit of time alone with God. Everyday. Look at these verses. *Psalm 55, Verse 17 (TLB), “I will pray morning, noon, and night, pleading aloud with God; and he will hear and answer.”*

So, I'm going to put it in my schedule and make an appointment and I'm not going to break it. That's the only way you can do it. Otherwise, days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months and all of a sudden it's been a long time since you've read your Bible. Mark 1:35, about Jesus, it says, *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*

For some of us we'd say, very early before noon, we got up and we went off to solitary place to pray. Now, if Jesus needed to do this, do you think you need to do it? Do you think I need to do it if Jesus himself said I need time out, I need some quiet time, I need some spiritual recharging, not just on Sundays? How would it be if you said, I'm going to fast Monday through Saturday and not eat any food and then on Sunday I'm going to eat all I can? Your system would be a little upset. You would get spiritual indigestion. And God says, schedule me into your life. Establish the habit of regular prayer, regular Bible study. Time alone with God.

So, making God first in my life means putting him first in my finances, in my interests, in my relationships, in my schedule.

And then number 5, *Put God first in your troubles.* Oh, that's a good one. I'm glad to have God first in my troubles. What are we talking about? I'm talking about the problems and the pressures and the crises that you're going to go through the rest of the year. Do you know what they are? I don't know what they are. But you will face some difficulties in your life before the year is over. It's inevitable, folks.

But, putting God first in your troubles. What does it mean? Who do you turn to first when your life caves in? When everything falls apart who do you turn to first? Now I'm amazed at how many Christians even see God as a last resort. Some of us treat him like a fire extinguisher, use only in case of emergency.

So, what does it mean, you have no other God before me? It means you put him first in every area of your life including the hassles of life. Lord, what do you think about this situation? How do you see it from your point of view? How should I deal with this problem? You'll be amazed at how God impresses upon you the solution to your problem. You see, God is waiting to help you. Look at **Psalm 50, Verse 15, "Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."** Then, in **Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of trouble."** When you get knocked around at work, go into a solitary place, shut the door, take a prayer break. Call on the Lord, say God help me out. I just got browbeaten by the boss. I've too many things to get done, too many deadlines and there's no way I can get it all done.

Call upon him in your time of trouble. God wants you to turn to him first. Frankly, I don't know how people face crises without the Lord. I really don't. Some of you have been through some major struggles this year and we've been through them together. And the way you made it through because you've had the Lord. But how do some people make it? Well, frankly, a lot of them don't. They fall apart. And they're scarred for life. And they carry resentment for all their lives. And they don't make it through.

Folks, these are **five practical areas in which you can put Christ first in your life -- in your finances, your interests, your relationships, your schedule, and your troubles.**

What holds first place in your life? Who is going to be your God? The first step to live a fulfilled life is this -- make God Number One in your life. It means an all-out commitment to God's dear Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Look at Colossians 1:18 (CSB), what it says about Jesus Christ, **"He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything."**

First place in everything – not Christ and my job, or Christ and my family, or Christ and my recreation. The Lord Jesus wants you to make him alone first place in your life. Are you ready to do that?