I. Set Up:

A. By Worship Leader: The Sermon today is on Exodus 20, which is the passage with the Ten Commandments. Have you ever thanked God for the Ten Commandments? For God's Law? Psalm 19:7-10 reads:

B. By CPs before sermon: Read Exodus 20:1-17

II. Intro

A. In my office I have a copy of the rules our oldest son posted on his door when he was about six and his brother was 4.

1. Obay me.
2. If I make any more rules, obay them.
3. Don't argue
4. Don't fight with Jason.
5. Don't hurt Fiesty.
6. If you rearange my room fix it unles I tell you not to.
7. Don't throw things, unless I let you.
8. No spitting

B. I share this list from time to time, not because it's such a cliché. So many kids post rules for their room. I post it to say, this is not what is happening when God gives us the Law. This show the law as a power play. I want you to see the Law as a gift that God shares with those He loves – with those he has already rescued.

III. This is the 9th sermon in our 40-week trek through the Bible, where our goal is to see THE Story – to grasp the Big Picture. To better understand God's character, nature, plan and purposes.

A. There were a few messages from the first few chapters in Genesis – focusing on creation, fall and promise. I then argued that the real story begins with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. So we looked at a few thing with Abraham. And then we crossed into Exodus – initially with the call of Moses. And then last week with the Passover, which powerfully reinforced the idea that sin is a capital offense, but an innocent third party can die so that guilty people can go free.

B. Today we're in Exodus 20 – where we receive the Ten Commandments. After the death of Egypt's firstborn, Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelite slaves leave. Then he changed his mind and chased after them, trapping them against the Red Sea. This is where God parts the waters and provides for their escape.[1]

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C. There are other notable things that happen in Exodus and the books right after it: manna from heaven, the golden calf incident, the building of the Tabernacle. Moses strikes a rock and water comes out of it (Exod. 17:6), which is yet another setup for Jesus. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 10: "they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (v. 4). As Tim Keller put it, Jesus is the true and better rock. He was struck for us, and from him flows the water of life for people who would otherwise die of thirst. There is a lot going on.

D. Everything inside of me wants to slow down. We are not going to do that.

E. Today we're going to focus on the Law. On the idea that AFTER God saved the Jews - and the order is important. He doesn't lead with the Law. He leads with Love. He rescues first. And then, after He has rescued them, he says – let me give you some advice about how the live.

F. We are going to talk about "the advice." The Law. The Rules. I want focus here because:

1. The rules are important.

2. But as a rule, we do not like rules.

3. There is quite a bit of confusion about all of this.

4. But, the giving of the Law is another example of God's love for you.

IV. Just so you know, I feel like before we can see how beautiful the Law is, I have to clear away a lot of brush. I need you to understand what we are talking about, and what we are not talking about.

A. When Lawyers talk about the law – those who have gone to law school and then passed the bar. When they talk about the law they are talking about acts of Congress, bills that have been endorsed by state legislatures. They are referring to local ordinances. They are talking about rules and regulations we make up. This is sometimes referred to as positive law – not because these laws are good.[2] They might be. But because they have been posited. We have established them.

B. When philosophers talk about the law, they're talking about natural law, which refers to the moral principles grounded in creation order. Natural law – which not everyone believes in – is the idea that some things are right or wrong before any legislature votes on them. Governments do not create these moral realities. In a healthy society, they simply recognize them and try to work with them.

1. There is a lot to be said about Natural Law.[3] I suspect you're not surprised to hear that I believe in it. Not just

a) C.S. Lewis famously opens Mere Christianity noting that people know there is right and wrong. We see it when they quarrel. They appeal to it when they say things like, "You can't cut in line. I was here first." "I helped you so you should help me."

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b) In his book, The Abolition of Man, Lewis notes how the basics of right and wrong are found in every culture. Paul explains in Romans 2 that this is because the requirements of the law are written on our hearts. In other words, even people who have never read the Ten Commandments have some awareness of moral obligation.

C. On top of lawyers and philosophers, you also have theologians using the term law.

1. When they talk about The Law, they are talking about The Law that God establishes in His Word. And they make this more confusing both because they use the term Law in three different ways: 1) To the first five books of the Bible – of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures; 2) to Ten Commandments; and 3) to the Ten Commandments and everything Moses got from God at Sinai.[4]

2. And they divide the third category into three sections: 1) civil law – which was in place for Israel when it was a theocracy. We are not a theocracy. These laws do not apply to us; and 2) ceremonial law – which applied to temple sacrifices, religious protocols and purity rituals, which ended when Jesus was crucified. The Book of Leviticus is full of ceremonial laws for the Levites (the priests). This also does not apply to us, because Christ's death put an end to the sacrificial system; and then – finally – there is a third section of the law – the moral law – which does still apply.

D. I'm sharing all of this – positive law, natural law, the civil, ceremonial and moral, Romans 2 - because they will be on the quiz. I'm joking.

E. The Law can be complicated. I want to make it simple. When I use the term Law I am referring to the Ten Commandments and the moral lessons of the other information God shared on Mount Sinai.

F. And the Ten Commandments are the Ten Commands God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai:

1. We talk about the Law coming in Two Tablets – the first four, which focus on our relationship with God: 1) No Gods before God; 2) no images; 3) honor his name; 4) Keep the Sabbath;

2. And the next six, which govern our relationship with each other: 5) honor your parents; 6) don't murder; 7) no adultery; 8) don't steal; 9) no false witness and 10) don't covet.

V. I have five points.

A. First, there is a law.

1. There are absolutes. Natural Law is real. There are right and wrong ways to do some things. Not everything. But there is a grain to the universe. And some ways of living are better than other ways.

2. Please understand, these are fighting words today. I would be shouted down at many universities for saying this.

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a) One of the big divisions at the moment is between those who believe that there are no moral absolutes and that any suggestion that there are is just a power play by one group trying to oppress another.

b) And those who believe there is a Law. That Natural Law is real. That it emerges from the heart and character and order of the Law Giver.

3. Since I have already stepped in it, let me keep going. The Bible claims that there is a law. Which means, those cultures that live closer to the Law – that are more aligned with creation order - are better in certain ways than those who do not.

4. Today many contend that we have the right to declare our own truth and that we should be free from all restrictions. Of course, this gets contentious because:

a) Freedoms – as the term is often understood today – clash. Your freedoms and mine freedoms tend to run into each other at some point. Some you can say everyone is free, but that doesn't work in real life.

b) And to add to the confusion, there are two fundamentally different understandings of freedom in play. When some use the term freedom, they mean "I'm free from the law. Others talk about the freedom of the law.

(1) Some talk as if train tracks limit the freedom of the train. Others hold that a train is only free to be a train – and to race across the countryside – when it stays on the tracks. You have freedom from the tracks and freedom of the tracks.

(2) We are free to do nothing. Or we can be disciplined and learn how to paint or play the violin and then we have the freedom to create art or music.

5. The point I am making here is that there a grain to the universe. There is a way things work best. And God's law is more like natural law than positive law. It's more like the law of gravity than it is like something passed by Congress – with this difference. The effects of breaking God's Laws tend to be less immediate.

6. If you step out a window, you fall right away. If you lie – if you break "God's moral law" – it might "work" for a while. Telling a lie might get you out of a bind. But if you lie a lot, eventually you will be deemed a liar and people will not trust you and your life will not work.

7. It may take years, decades – perhaps generations – for the effects of the law to play out. But they eventually will. Perhaps not this side of the grave, but eventually they will. In the grand scheme of things, we do not break God's laws, we break ourselves against them.[5]

8. Point one: there is a law. There are some absolutes. And God's design – which is captured in his law – is what works best.

B. Second: God's Law is Good.

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1. I am not simply saying this because God's Word says it's good, although it certainly does. Earlier in the service you heard Psalm 19:7, which declares: "The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul." We could look elsewhere in the Psalms. Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm and it spends most of its time celebrating The Law.

   a) V24: describes it as a counselor that helps us navigate a challenge.

   b) V105 describes the Law as a lamp that guides our way;

   c) V165: talks about the great peace that comes to those who love the law.

   d) We could find more of the same in Proverbs and Deuteronomy and I Timothy and James and Romans 7.

   e) But I'm not saying the Law is good because it says it's good.

2. Nor am I'm saying it's good because it's not very restrictive. Which is true: people think the law is all of this Thou Shalt Not:

   a) But being told what you can't do is more freeing than being told what you must do. Being told I cannot paint the wall blue implies we're free to paint it white, red, green or purple. Or not paint it.

   b) And The Law is mercifully brief. The joke is, we got rid of the Ten Commandments and have replaced them with 25 million other laws.

3. Nor am I saying it's good because there is a grand positive behind every one of the negative commandments, which there is. God says, "don't not commit adultery, not because he is trying to be mean and negative, but because he wants to protect marriages. He says do not steal because he wants a society that works. Imagine a neighborhood where promises were kept, marriages honored, possessions safe, elderly parents cared for, and nobody envied the family next door.

4. What I am saying is that the Law is Good because it's helpful. It's something like a cheat code.[6] Do you want a map for life? Do you want to know how to win? God says, "let me help you."[7]

C. Third: God's Love leads him to share His law. Please note:

1. God's love comes first. First he rescues. He gets them out of Egypt. (To cite Exodus 19 – he "carries" them "on eagles wings.") Then comes the Law.

2. And it was a gift. I talked about it being insight as to how things actually work that anyone would want. A clue as to the grain of the universe. Well, the Jewish slaves desperately needed this. They had been slaves for four hundred years. They didn't know how to function as a society. How to make decisions. How to live together.

3. The Law was a gift that God gave to people to help them survive – which he needed them to do. This is the blood line that will lead to Jesus. He needs them to survive as a society for over a thousand years. Not many societies do that.

4. So. God – who loved them first - gave them his Law.

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5. So – Point One: there is a law. Point Two: It is good. Point Three: God's love leads him to share his law;

D. Four: The Law helps us see our need.

1. One of the main functions of the Law is to help us see our sin.

2. It actually has three functions. It is: a curb, a guide and a mirror.[8]

a) As a curb, it restrains evil. It's the law that a society embraces to keep wrong in check.

b) As a guide, it teaches us how to live.

c) And as a mirror, it helps us see ourselves more clearly. It gives us an objective standard that helps us realize that we are coming up very short. The law shows us our need for a Savior.

3. You may have noticed that not everyone understands themselves very well. They do not see themselves accurately. And when they are off, it usually that they think they are better than they are.

a) We judge others by their actions. We judge ourselves by our intentions. And that means we often view ourselves as being better than others.

b) A friend – who had so many driving violations that he was required to go to a remedial driving school to keep his license, said there were about 50 people there. And the instructor started by asking: how many of you are better than average drivers. And virtually every hand went up.

4. We need to know, it's very hard to see ourselves accurately. It's very easy to think we are better than we are. To be like the Pharisees – who were pretty impressed with how well they kept the Law.

a) Jesus called them White Washed Tombs, Blind guides, hypocrites, a brood of vipers and other things

b) It's pretty easy to be like the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

c) The Law sets an objective standard that we can measure ourselves against. And when we do, we fail. Especially after Jesus explains the law

(1) You heard, don't commit murder. I say, don't get angr

(2) You heard it said, don't commit adultery, I say if you have looked at a woman with lust you have already .

5. Now, one more side point here before I go on. I am saying that the law is like a mirror that helps us see the dirt on our face. Understand that mirrors do not actually make us clean. We do not scrub our face with the mirror. Similarly, the law cannot save us. Having clearer instructions does not give us a new heart. We need forgiveness and the transforming work of God's Spirit.

E. Five: Everything changes with Jesus.

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1. We will do a deeper dive on this point later in this series – and also next year when we get to the Book of Romans. But for now, let me simply note: Jesus completes the Law. He fulfills it.

    a) In Matthew 5 he says "don't think I came to abolish it. I came to fulfill it.

2. This changes everything. It is the pathway for our salvation. And it changes our reason for trying to keep it.

3. I hope that you have heard me say that we are saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves, it is a gift of God. Consequently, no one can boast.

4. We are NOT saved by works. I have made this point a lot.

5. Well, that is not entirely true. We are saved by Works – just not our works. We are saved by Jesus who perfectly kept the Law. And, having done so, he then took upon himself our moral debt and gave us his righteousness.

6. The Law points to Jesus and was completed in Jesus. Everything changes with Jesus. Everything changes with Jesus.

F. Now, as you might expect, I'm going to whine about how much important or interesting stuff I don't get to cover.

1. debates about which Mosaic commands – for instance, the Sabbath - remain binding and how they apply. What is meant by "works of the law."

2. I've said nothing about Les Mis – my favorite novel – which has a major character (Javert) who represents the Law, and who ends his life when he realizes he can't save himself.

3. Alas, I need to land the plane and there is one more point.

G. The Sixth and final Point: When it comes to the Law we have four options:

1. I've argued that: 1) there is a law; 2) it is good; 3) it is God's love that comes first; 4) the Law helps us see our need; 5) everything changes with Jesus. Number Six: you have four options:

2. Option A: You can Reject the law. Say there is no such thing and try to live that way. This was a popular view a while back. Few tried it for long. In intellectual circles it is now losing favor. When people like ? say, there is no morality so there is no moral reason to say murder and rape are wrong, but we can chose to live that way – most people say that's not for me.

3. Option B: You can Say there is no Natural Law and replace it with Human Laws. You can reject Divine Law – e.g., The Ten Commandments - and write your own.

4. Option C: You can believe that there is a divine law and think you are keeping it.

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5. Or, Option D: You can Rejoice in God's Law. You can see it for the gift that it is from a God who led with love and then said, "let me help you here. Let me tell you what is going to work best.

H. So let me go back to where we started. Please do not miss the fact that my son's first rule was Obey Me. God's first words at Sinai weren't a rule at all. They were a reminder: I am the Lord Your God who brought you out of Egypt. He introduces himself as rescuer before he offers the Law. And the Law is a gift.

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[1] This is a very high drama moment, not – in my humble opinion – caught very well in any classical biblical movie, in part because the movies generally show a couple hundred people racing across, not a million plus, with animals and the like.

[2] Note: *positive law* is not the same as *legal positivism*. Positive law refers to the laws human authorities establish. Legal positivism is a theory about what makes something legally valid: its grounding in recognized human institutions and practices, rather than its moral goodness. A legal positivist can believe in objective right and wrong—and judge a law deeply unjust—while still recognizing it as an existing law.

[3] Natural Law has a long history in Christian thought, although Christians differ over how much fallen human beings can reliably discern it.

[4] To be clear, there is also a fourth way: it also refers to an operating principle or power, as in the "law of sin" in Romans 7.

[5] This line is generally credited to Cecil B. DeMille, from his *Ten Commandments* era.

[6] I do not want to imply that if we obey life will always work. Also, the deepest reason to obey is out of love for the One who rescued us, not to get better results.

[7] It's not as simple as this. The Book of Proverbs can make it seem like life is very simple. If you do X you will get Y. The Book of Job makes it clear it's not that simple. But the Law of God does provide guardrails that help us live a life that works. And in many ways, it tells us things we're not smart enough to figure out until we've paid a heavy price.

[8] This three-fold idea comes from Calvin's Institutes, although he uses different language than curb, mirror and guide.

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