

## A FOUNDATION FOR FREEDOM - EX. 20:1-17

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S LIFE VERSE

Nancy was very ill. She somehow knew that she was close to the end of her life as she called her family around her bedside. It was a strange illness that Nancy had contracted. It began with a white coating on the tongue. Within a day, the victim had a burning fever throughout the entire body. Then it was usually only a few days to a week before the afflicted passed away. The pioneer farming community in Indiana in those days called this strange disease *Milk Sick* because all that they knew was that it was somehow connected with the milk of cows. Today, we know more about it. A cow wandered into a field of snake plants and ate of the poisonous root. Amazingly, the poison passed through the cow into the milk without harming the cow in any way. Then anyone who touched or drank the milk would be poisoned. Nancy had milked one of their cows that had eaten that poisonous snake root.

As Nancy drew her family around her just before her passing, she was especially attentive to her 2 children - one of whom was a 9 year old boy. She reminded her children of the importance of belief in God and reliance

upon God's word. She again reiterated the importance of the 10 commandments that would give to them a solid foundation for life. In many ways, Nancy was a remarkable woman for she could neither read nor write. But she had memorized significant portions of God's word. And the 10 commandments were what she quoted most often to her children. As she was passing away, her last words to her son as best recalled by him were these: *I am going away from you now and shall not return. I know that you will be good boy and be kind to your father. I want you to live as I have taught you, to love your Heavenly Father, and to keep his commandments.*

Nancy died on October 5, 1818. She was laid to rest in a black cherry coffin on a windy hill besides the graves of neighbors, Tom and Betsy Sparrow, who were so close they were almost like family. And her children never forgot the impact that their mother had on their lives. Especially her love for God's word and respect for God's commandments. Her passing made an especially strong impact upon that 9 year old son. For you see, Nancy contracted her illness doing his chore. He was the one who daily milked the cows. But on this one day, for a reason no one but God knows, his mother Nancy had done his chore for him. And she contracted the milk

poisoning and died. And the son would live. He would live to grow up and make perhaps the greatest impact on our country that any person would ever make. The boy who would grow up to become the 16th President of our country, the son of Nancy Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln.

Even though Abraham Lincoln only had his mother for 9 years, he never underestimated the impact that she had on him. He once said publicly, *All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.*

And by far the strongest impact that she had on his life was found in her spiritual strength. Abraham Lincoln never forgot his mother's last words to him - *Keep His Commandments*. So it should not surprise us that of all the passages in the Bible, the favorite of Abraham Lincoln was Exodus 20:1-17 - the time when God gave the 10 commandments to Moses.

During these Summer Sundays, we have been begun looking at favorite Life Verses of famous people. Last week, we studied the favorite verse of the famous pioneer missionary, Hudson Taylor – the 6<sup>th</sup> word of the Lord Jesus Christ from the cross, “Tetellistai – It is Finished. Now I thought it would be appropriate on this Holiday Sunday morning when we celebrate our national independence to look at the favorite passage of one of our most

significant national leaders, the president who lead our country through its most trying time of Civil War, Abraham Lincoln.

Let's read Abraham Lincoln's favorite passage together from Exodus 20:1-17. READ TEXT.

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.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to

a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

(Exodus 20:1-17)

\*It is, of course, an impossibility to thoroughly examine each of the 10 commandments in one sermon. But for our purposes this morning, allow me to draw your attention to 3 great impacts that this passage had on the life of Abraham Lincoln.

1. The 10 commandments gave to Abraham Lincoln a strong, moral foundation for his life.

The first and most lasting impression that is made on the mind of any student of Lincoln's life is his commitment to honesty and integrity. Honest Abe was the nickname that was given to him that has stayed with us even to this day. Even before he had entered the political arena, after he had taught himself to read and write and studied Blackstone's Law books to the place where he passed the bar exam, he had the reputation of being the most honest lawyer in his whole county. A contemporary, A.C. Benson said this about Attorney Lincoln, *He was quite indifferent to money. He defended poor clients for nothing, and would even remind opposing counsel of points against his own case that they had overlooked.* It is clear that truth and justice were paramount for Lincoln. He had entered the field of law for the most noble reason - so that justice would be the prevailing standard in our

land. But we must never overlook the fact that it was his acceptance of God's character and standards that gave to him a foundation for moral certainty.

I needn't belabor the point that we live in a day when any foundation for moral certainty has been systematically and deliberately chipped away beneath our feet as a nation. Educators have been teaching our students for a past several decades that there is no absolute truth on the college campuses. All ethics are situational. What is right at this moment today might be wrong in a different situation tomorrow. It is not just happenstance that their boldness in asserting such brazen lies came on the heels of the Liberal Theologians attacking the inspired and inerrant nature of the Word of God even to the point where they asserted that God is Dead. For once the absolute authority has been removed, there is no more foundation for absolute truth.

Now happily the Liberal Theologians did not convince many people in our country that God is Dead. A vast majority of people in our country believe in the existence of God. And this should not surprise us - for how could a few arrogant, self-proclaimed intellectuals hope to kill God. But sadly, many of these people who believe that God is alive and well, have failed to see the moral implications for God being alive and well. For while

rejecting the notion that God is dead, many have accepted the situational ethic that had been advanced after his supposed demise. And this has caused unbelievable inconsistencies in our justice system that would have been laughed out of court in previous generations.

\*Let me just give one brief example to illustrate my point - hundreds of others could also be offered like it. In 1974, 19 year old Colin Fearon was convicted of murder and sentenced to 25 years to life in a New York State penitentiary. By the time he was released, he had filed over 544 lawsuits against the New York State Prison system. He had sued because his coffee was cold, because his cell was sprayed for roaches, because he was awakened by a guard delivering throat lozenges that he had needed and requested, and hundreds of other similar charges - all at taxpayers expense, of course, because he is incarcerated. He even sued for 3.2 million because the prison officials didn't give him enough time to file all of his claims.

Now can you imagine judges of the 19th century allowing such foolishness to go on? Can you imagine how heartily they would have laughed if they even knew of such a prospect existing? Why do we put up with such nonsense and then congratulate ourselves that we are such an

intelligent and sophisticated society? It can only be because we have lost the foundation for moral certainty. And we have lost that, because we have lost the value of God's commandments. And we are all paying a horrible price.

We need to be reminded as individuals and as a nation of a very simple, yet profound truth. God communicated to Moses on Mt. Sinai some 3 and a half thousand years ago some of his moral and ethical requirements for man.

These were given in the form of commandments. These commandments were based upon his own divine character. Almost all of these same commandments that were morally binding to the Israelites were repeated by Jesus Christ and the N.T. writers as being absolute truth. These same commandments formed the moral foundation for Abraham Lincoln's life 3,000 years later - he recognized them to still be valid. And whether we even want to accept them or not, God's Word is still valid today. If we accept God's commandments and obey them, we will prosper and be successful as a nation and as individuals. If we reject them, we are going to continue to pay a horrible price.

2. In the second place, The 10 commandments taught Abraham Lincoln to acknowledge and respect God.

The 10 commandments can be divided into 2 major sections. The first 4 speak of our relationship with God himself. The Lord Jesus Christ acknowledged this when he said that the first commandment can be summed up with the words, *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart.*

\*We are to acknowledge no other gods before the true and living God.

\*We are not to make an idols or graven images of a deity and worship it.

\*We are to be careful to respect the name of the Lord and not take misuse it.

\*We are to recognize the Lord's Day as a special day of worship of the Lord.

\*Each of these first 4 commandments speaks of our personal relationship with God.

Now we must emphasize the fact that these commandments had a marked impact upon Lincoln's life long before he was actually a born again Christian.

The Apostle Paul writes of God's law in Galatians 3:24, *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.* Nowhere is this illustrated more clearly than in the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Listen to his own words written in a letter to a friend. *I have been reading the beatitudes and can at least claim the blessing that is pronounced upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. . . When I left Springfield, I asked the people to pray for me, but I was not yet a Christian. When I buried my son - the severest trial of my life - I was not yet a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg, and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated my self to the Lord Jesus Christ.* He then went on to write of his faith that he had so long sought, the change that had taken place in his heart, and his love for the Savior.

So it cannot be disputed that these 10 commandments had a marked impact upon Abraham Lincoln's life for the good of our country even before he had been personally born again into the family of God. For even as an unbeliever, Abraham Lincoln acknowledged the existence of God and respected this divine being who was his creator.

There are many born again Christians who have sat by and watched change after change being made in our country in silence. In fact, all of us to one degree or another are guilty of this. As prayer was removed from our schools, we consoled ourselves that prayer offered by an unbeliever is not

effective and powerful anyway; as the ten commandments were banned from public walls and as they continue to be as in a Supreme Court ruling just this past week, we console ourselves that the unregenerate heart cannot comprehend the commandments of God fully anyway; as nativity scenes were removed from court house lawns and replaced with Santa sleighs, we convinced ourselves that it was no big deal. And perhaps each of these by itself is not the major issue - but all of them together have had a devastating accumulative effect on our nation.

Now I am certainly not advocating that Christianity become the national religion of our country. Baptists have historically believed in freedom of worship - that everyone should be given the liberty to worship according to the dictates of conscience. Even if people choose to worship a false god or no god at all, they should have that freedom in our nation. Citizens should be allowed to worship as Jews or Moslems or any other religion as well as Christians. True Christians have historically believed that the power and truth of the gospel is effective to change the hearts of the unregenerate.

But what we have effectively seen in our country is a Humanism taking over which is really Atheism made to be the state religion, and this is very

dangerous. Under the guise of separation of church and state, the smallest minority of people in our country have effectively advanced their religion of atheistic humanism to be our state religion. Our students are taught in our schools that there is no God when evolution is promoted as true scientific fact and any mention or reference to God is removed. And this has robbed us of the heritage of morality and true justice in our country.

We must realize that there is great blessing that is naturally benefited to a nation that acknowledges and respects God. The blessings that derive all flow from the character of God. God is a God of truth - so there must then be an acknowledgement of truth. God is a God of justice - so there necessarily flows the concept of justice to the courtrooms. God is a God of righteousness - so there are standards of morality that are accepted as being right. And irregardless of whether individuals personally have a relationship with God or not, there are still some universally accepted truths that benefit all of society.

3. But let's move now in closing to our third and final consideration. The 10 commandments also taught Abraham Lincoln to respect and honor his fellow man.

Abraham Lincoln is remembered as a man who worked tirelessly for the emancipation of slaves in our country. He was the President who pushed for the amendment giving equal status to all citizens. It was his proclamation of emancipation that freed those who had lived all of their lives in bondage, owned by another human being. We must never forget that the stand that Abraham Lincoln took was very unpopular among many people in our nation. In fact, half of our country revolted and tried to form its own nation. Most politicians would have tried their best to mediate some agreeable position in compromise. But Lincoln stood firm on his convictions. Where did he get such a strong view of respect towards his fellow man? It was from his acceptance and practice of the 10 commandments.

I mentioned before that the 10 commandments fall into 2 major sections. The first 4 commandments speak of our relationship with God our creator. The last 6 commandments speak of our relationship and respect for our fellow man.

- \*that we are to honor our parents.

- \*that we are not to commit premeditated murder.

- \*that we are not to violate a person with sexual immorality.

\*that we are not to steal another's personal property.

\*that we are not to lie or bear false witness.

\*that we are not to covet what is not ours.

Even though stated in negative terms, each commandment also reinforces a positive relationship that we are to have with our fellow man. We should respect the lives and property and integrity of one another and be truthful people of integrity ourselves.

The Lord Jesus realized this message in these commandments as he summed all of them up with the words *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

The quality of life of any society is directly in proportion to the respect that citizens have for one another. When property and lives are valued, there is a mutual respect that produces a community atmosphere where life can be lived and enjoyed. But when property and lives are despised, there develops a distrustful anarchy where it is everyone for himself and nobody is able to enjoy life.

God provides a foundation for freedom in his word. It is only as we accept and live his commandments that we can live the fullness of life that

He designed.

Now whereas a respect for God and his commandments brings health and wellbeing to any society, it is most important that each individual personally accepts God's word in order to have a personal relationship with God himself. Abraham Lincoln came to recognize that in life. He came to the place where he personally invited the Lord Jesus Christ into his life and was born again into God's family. He was then able to not only work towards a peaceful society (as he strove for his whole life), but he was also able to have the personal peace within that he had not always had during times of intense trial. And happily, President Abraham Lincoln did live to see peace and unity restored to our nation as he also experienced the personal peace and contentment that can only come by knowing that one is a member of God's family.

I close this morning with the final snapshot from the life of Abraham Lincoln as conveyed by his wife's testimony recorded by F.W. Boreham in his biography of the great president. The scene is familiar to all of us - a private box at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. President and Mrs. Lincoln came to this particular play, but his mind was not really on the play

that evening, it was rather on spiritual things. In fact, they arrived when the play was already half over. It was shortly after they had settled into their seats, that the President leaned over to his wife and whispered into her ear, *Now that the war is over, I would like to take you on a tour of the middle east. We can visit Palestine. We can journey together to see Gethsemane and Calvary. We can walk the streets of Jeru. . .*

Before that final word was fully out of his mouth, a shot rang out and he slumped over in his chair. He had been speaking to his wife about visiting the city of Jerusalem in Israel when he was immediately ushered to the Heavenly Jerusalem. The man who had devoted his life to acknowledging and honoring God's commandments was immediately ushered into the presence of the author of those commandments.

Abraham Lincoln has been dead for 140 years now – Rockford Baptist Church was just 8 years old when he was assassinated. Can you imagine the devastating effect the news of the President's assassination just after the trauma of the Civil War must have had on the first members of this church? But the solid foundation of Lincoln's belief in God's word was able to sustain our forefathers through the most trying times. And those

commandments that Abraham Lincoln acknowledged and respected throughout his lifetime, since his mother taught them to him as a child, as still as relevant and true today as they were when he lived.

\*We are wise if we also acknowledge and respect them.

\*We are wise if we do everything that we can to promote their acceptance in our country.

\*We are wise if we foster a living relationship with their author - for it is only through God that we can have true freedom and liberty.