

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-3; Matthew 4:1-2,8-11

Sermon Title: "Infinite vs. Finite"

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Today we are beginning a journey through the Ten Commandments – these ancient laws given to the Israelites in their wilderness journey out of slavery and bondage – these laws which have found their way into our culture in many different avenues, from monuments to films to just popular knowledge to some degree. But the question that we will be exploring throughout this sermon series is what do these ancient laws mean for the modern day Christian?

Now for those of you who look at the title of the sermon to see where things might be going, ignore the title printed. The Holy Spirit has moved in other ways and so the title for today is "Infinite vs. Finite".

So this morning, John shared with us in our readings the first commandment – "You shall have no other gods before the Lord". Now, of course this begs the question – what are these other "gods" – and more specifically what are these other "gods" in our world today? What are the things, the people, the concepts even which we elevate to a godlike status – where we base our decisions, our actions around them and we allow them to be the guiding force in our lives instead of our God?

In our second reading from the gospel of Matthew, I believe Jesus gives us a look into two "gods" of sorts which are still alive in our world. When Jesus is out in the wilderness facing temptation, being told that all the kingdoms of the world could be his – to be an earthly ruler, to possess the physical world, he encountered the temptations of greed and power. These two things still for many today become "gods" in our world. And I bet that you can name other things, mindsets, concepts, even people whom have been elevated to a "god-like" status. Where people base their life around the pursuit of something or the example of someone.

Now, this may seem like a silly question but what's the difference between God the Almighty and these "gods" created in the world? The difference is literally infinite. Let's consider what is gained by both. When the Israelites receive the reminder from God saying "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery", they are being reminded of their identity as God's Chosen people. They are being reminded of God's love and care which is just given to them. When we hear those words, I hope we hear a reminder that we are God's beloved children as well as being reminded of that boundless love and care from our God which still fills our world today. And with that comes something that is truly infinite. Something that is not held in the physical reality of this world - but something that is beyond it. A gift of being God's own, a gift of that relationship with God which sees us through this life, one that we can trust and in which we can be confident. And the best part, this is a gift which does not end with our last breath but accompany us into eternity too. This is an infinite gift.

Now how about those "gods" of the world - what does one gain there? One may gain wealth or status. One may gain popularity, gain a sense of security (one may call it a false sense of security), or other aspects of the physical world. But all of these things are finite. They are limited to this world and are fleeting, they disappear when we breath our last if not before.

I was talking the other day with a close friend of mine about this very idea of the infinite vs. the finite - that infinite gift of looking toward and serving God only vs. the finite gift of serving forces of this world. And he shared with me some of his story and is happy for me to share it with you today. For a time, one could say he served the "gods" of this world. And in doing so, he was amassing wealth, status, seeing possibilities of working his way up a corporate ladder of sorts, having it all. These things were what drove him, the forces which he followed and based decisions around. And then, what in the grand scheme of things could seem like a blink of an eye, the finite was gone - it was all stripped away. Illness, medical expenses, the backs turned

by family and loved ones took it all. It was then from that place, perhaps seeing the fleeting nature of finite gifts from those human-created “gods” which so many people knowingly or unknowingly end up serving, that he began to crave the infinite gift of our God. A gift that no matter what life throws our way, no matter what is taken from us in this world, no matter what is given to us in this world, the gift of being God’s beloved, the gift of God’s love and care, and the knowledge that we can be confident in these gifts to see us through whatever this life brings, they could not be taken away. It was only when he lost the finite and saw the fleeting nature of the gifts received when solely following those created “gods” of this world, it was only when that was lost, that he was able to gain the infinite. That he was able to embrace the infinite which was there all along, waiting for him to acknowledge God and to acknowledge the beautiful gift, the eternal gift, of being called God’s beloved. And since then, while the finite is still limited in his life as he works to rebuild, he has a peace, a calm, a confidence that the infinite gift of God is all one truly needs.

Beloved People of God, let’s start today with being reminded of that infinite gift of God’s love and care in which we can trust and be confident. And in the same moment, may we examine our lives and look for the places where we have given the finite too much power. May we look for those places where we still allow those created “gods” of this world too control us. And may we do our best, every day, to not put our trust in the finite, but in the infinite gifts of our Great God, as we worship and serve the Lord only. So be it and may it be so. Amen.