

Sermon on the fifth commandment: EX 20:12

‘Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.’

Scripture readings: Eph 6:1-4 & Luke 2:41-52

What would you be willing to do if you were given a conditional promise that, if you did it, your life would be great? Would you do it? As you know the preaching team has been working through the Ten Commandments and today we have come to the fifth command. The commandments are divided into two sections, called tablets referring of course to the stone tablets that Moses wrote the original Ten Commandments on. The first section addresses how we are to live in relation to God and the second in relation to man. The fifth command is the very first in the second section on how we are to live in relation to man, and it offers just such a conditional promise. “Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” So our theme: **Honouring your parents activates the promise of a good life.**

To understand and apply the command and its promise we will be answering 3 questions:

1. What is required in the command?
2. What is the promise for following the command?
3. What is the significance of the command?

So, what is required in the command?

Under the heading of what is required, I have 3 points:

Point #1, **it is the only command that is not a prohibition, but an exhortation**. It commands us to do something good rather than refrain from doing something bad. *Do* honour your parents. The other 9 commandments imply that we will instead be active in the good things that the commandment does not prohibit. And later teaching from scripture exhorts the good things to do. For example, the New Testament teaches that men are to love our wives, protect them, take pleasure in them and many other things. But in the Ten Commandments the prohibition is emphasized: **do not** commit adultery. The command to honour your parents reverses this pattern; it implies the prohibition: You shall not dishonour your parents. But it emphasizes the positive action. So, there is something very significant in honouring parents. God places unique and exclusive emphasis on it in the 10 commandments. We have an action command, not an inaction command. Rather than avoidance being commanded, it means that a special emphasis of pursuit and intentionality is being called for. *You need to plan for and move into action to honour your parents.*

Point # 2 under the heading of what is required: **the command is to honour**. We tend to think that honour here is obedience. And the Scriptures do teach that to obey is to honour. In two NT passages that expand on this command, Eph 6:1-3 where obedience is emphasized with reference to this command ‘to honour’ and also in Col 3:20. In both places the New Testament text uses the word *obey*. And notice how strongly it says it Colossians. After the command to obey it says “*in everything*”. Without

spending a lot of time here, there are cultural voices that speak to us and say “You can’t be serious...”. Our culture loves independence, and obedience interferes with the complete independence we are taught to crave. But that cultural voice is a lying voice. Kids between the ages of 3 and 18, will you give up on independence, making your own choices, deciding yourself what is best for you, and trust your parents? Can this command and promise convince you to think like this: If I want to be really happy, I will obey my parents all the time, in everything. And if I want my life to be bad I won’t...

I hope you are convinced. If you don’t want to obey, then today you have a big problem, and if you don’t change that problem will get bigger and bigger. That isn’t my opinion, we are talking about God’s Word here. Listen to Romans 1 where Paul describes the heart that is completely turned over to wickedness (vs 24&25), right there in the list of vices (vs 29&30) is “disobedient to parents”. It says when God gives you over to your own sinful ways you are characterized by a whole bunch of things we all agree are really bad, and.....being ‘disobedient to parents’ ....!! If today you are rebel against your parents’ instructions or resent them in your heart, I beg you to reconsider. I make this appeal as a man who was a rebel against his parents himself. You will suffer if you don’t change. Maybe you think it will be better to disobey and ignore and rebel and listen to the voices of the world or ungodly friends or the TV or the words of a song written with a good beat, but written by a person who understands nothing about love: lie, lie, lie, lie, lie, lie, lie, lie. How do I know? Either it is a lie, or God is a liar, because God says to obey a different voice; the voice of your parents. And God is not a liar. He is a truth-teller. Now there *are* cases where it is hard to obey, and even cases where we *must not obey*, and we will get to those but don’t assume that is you too easily. Start by obeying, unless with the counsel of experienced and wise adult elders you conclude that to obey your parents you would have to disobey God. So honour is obedience, but honour is more.

Honour also actively guards your parents’ reputation and wellbeing. Let me say that again. Honour is actively guarding your parents’ reputation and wellbeing. This cuts a wider swath of inclusion both in what the command requires and whom it is required from, doesn’t it? Wider because it is more than obedience and wider because it applies to everyone, not just those who still live with their parents, and not just those whose parents are still alive on earth... Yes, honouring your parents does not end when your parents die. There is no indication in the command that this would be so. So what I am about to say applies from your birth until your death. Honouring parents is, just like all the other ones, a command with lifelong application. The memory and legacy of your parents must be honoured to, to realize the promise.

Time does not permit an exhaustive study of practical ways to honour our parents outside of obedience as children, but we will quickly look at two examples that the Bible provides, to study what this could look like:

First in the form of a narrative where the principle of protecting reputation is taught. Does anyone remember the story of what Noah did once he got back off of the Ark? Let’s read (Gen 9:20-27). We expect a moral judgement of Noah don’t we? Drunk, naked, making a complete fool of himself. I am sure that God dealt with Noah on this sin, but that is not mentioned. It isn’t the point of the narrative. The point of the story instead is to show how two sons honoured and one son dishonoured their father’s

reputation. Shem and Japheth honoured their father in spite of his sin, and were blessed, Ham didn't and was cursed. Again, I remind you that we will address difficult cases at the end, but this example should inform how quickly we conclude that our parents are an 'impossible, difficult case'. Have your parents been seen getting completely obliterated on wine and running around in the buff? Let's not make excuses for ourselves. If we gossip and complain about them, resent, ignore or ridicule them, because of their sin or weaknesses or frailties, we are in a dangerous place. We need to guard their reputations. Like a soldier guarding a post, we need to guard their reputations.

The second biblical example illustrates the principle of honouring our parents by guarding their wellbeing ( read Mat 15:1-6) Here the point is that the Pharisees had led the people of Israel to forsake honouring their parents. They aren't providing for parents in need, and have allowed for a loophole in the command where God does not. Physical care was being neglected, and essentially being refused. Whenever we make an excuse, a loophole, like they do here, it is a masked refusal isn't it. I don't want to tell you the real reason because then I might have to do it or face some kind of consequence or retribution, so I will tell you something you can't rebut, so that I don't have to do what I don't want to do...Jesus has hard words for these people about this dishonour. He even reminds them that the death penalty was required in the Old Testament for failing to honour parents. He warned them they were in danger. Honouring our parents requires us to care for their physical – and where called for – emotional needs when they are no longer able to.

So that is the end of our longest point, but I wanted to spend the time there, because the application really hinges on a clear understanding of what honour means and entails.

Point # 3 is simple. **The command is to honour your father and mother.** Let me suggest that the inclusion of mother (in a patriarchal culture) has this significance: Easy to love mom. Sometimes harder to honour and respect her. Maybe this is because so often their warm care and nurture brings them so close and intimate, that we forget to grant them the respect and honour we give to those who stand more aloof and more distant. Often mom doesn't demand the same respect or inspire the fear that leads to respect. Here God is saying: give the same care and effort to obeying, and protecting mom's reputation and well-being. Or if it is the other way around and you find it hard to honour and respect dad, the point is the same. In giving honour, you must give it to both your parents. No favorites.

So honouring parents is an active command. Honour speaks well of. Honour cares for. Honour is to be applied in equal measure to each of your parents. Honour pursues obedience, pursues their wellbeing and is intentional and active in upholding their reputation, and even the memory of their reputation. Honour is a lifelong calling. This is what the command requires.

Which brings us the second question we want to answer: What does it promise? Our God is a rewarder. This is the promise: 'That it may go well with you'. As we saw earlier, the 5<sup>th</sup> command is the only one that exhorts, but it is also the only one coupled to a promise. Now in other places in the law, the other 9 commandments are also coupled to this same promise of well-being (Turn to Duet 11:8-9). They all carry the promise of long and good days. But God picks this command, in the 10, to emphasize the promise. Why? Why emphasize that for just this one command? I think God is explaining to you that

you are more likely to keep every other commandment if you honour your parents. So in other words: honour, listen to, respect, submit to, obey you parents, and it will be a guard against committing adultery, stealing, coveting and against breaking the other commands. If we let our parents wisdom and instructions guide us. If we will listen to their voice... If we will think of our parents, yes...and this is where it gets hard for some of us, but stay with me here...as better than us in a way, not in value, but in authority, in importance, in informed opinions, in foresight, often in character, in their ability to make decisions...for you...then we are positioned to *keep* the rest of the law and *receive the promise* connected to the entire law and commandments.

Does that seem hard? It is hard. Since the fall humankind has been desperate to escape submitting. We can only do it with God's marvelous power working in us. We call that power God's marvelous grace. But thought is not easy, remember this about the commandments: They are for your own good! God has customized them to deliver maximum benefit to you. (Read Duet 10:12-13) What does it say? What grace is there? Commands are not a burden; they are for your good. To mark clearly the pathway of blessing...to you...! So this command is promising what all God's commands promise...GOOD. To obey and honour parents is not a burden, it is good for you, and God knows that, and he wants to deliver the promise of GOOD to you. God knows that parents are highly invested. They make sacrifice after sacrifice. Kids I have a secret for you. Parents don't like poopie diapers, cleaning up barf, taking people to emergency rooms for stitches, worrying about how to pay the bills, and they don't like mini vans and family sedans better than Porsches and Corvettes. Why do they make these sacrifices? They care about you. That is why they keep investing and investing. Maybe this illustration can help you see what your parents feel for you. Imagine you are writing an essay and you lose your essay file after the first sentence. No big deal, right? You haven't put much into it. Now imagine you pulled an all nighter and are just finishing up page 13 and you lose it. Now what do you feel? You want to cry, scream, die...You have invested so much time, energy, and industry. So what is all this about investing? Here's the point: Parents have every reason in the world to steer you in the right direction. Your life getting messed up is like losing a file that they have been working on day in and day out for 5, 8, 13, 18 years. You really think they want to lose that file? Come on...So God wants to use the people who have made the largest investments in you, to guide you, and those people are your parents...Does that make sense?

And for the adults, the way to honour your parents looks different, but the principle doesn't. Honouring them as above you in stature and accomplishment will affect your life. To begin with, it will mortify some of the arrogance and pride we are all prone to, to practice intentionally honouring someone who has done so much for us. It is interesting that we seem to struggle with taking care of our parents when they get old. We are used to receiving care and support from them, and them doing things to help us when we are growing up, but when we settle into our comfortable middle aged life, and our energy levels begin to dwindle a little, we tend to whine, we tend to resent the intrusions into our world, in short, when tend to dishonour, and we break this command. And it won't go well for us. If you dump off a parent in a nursing home to get rid of them (and I do not mean to say at all that if you have a parent in a home it means that you have done this, there are many good homes and reasons this may be required). But do evaluate your heart. Do you visit them intentionally and regularly, do you look forward

to it, do you pray for them, do you send them encouragement notes, do you remember important dates, do you ask them to tell you stories about things they love to remember.....just a few examples...These are ways to continue to honour them. If your heart posture is wrong, pray and ask God for a new one. For their sake and for yours. Then the promise will be yours.

I do want to bring some distinction to what it means to have a good life; it does not mean life will be without suffering, that is too narrow a definition. Honouring our parents, will not prevent times of trial, but will help avoid unnecessary, avoidable suffering, and keep us in the place of God's blessing where we can access God's resources through prayer. And when we are fortified with God's resources, we can face every circumstance. Many times it will go well in ways we would like, but it will also go well when things are difficult. The most powerful illustration of this is the life of Christ. He honoured his Father in everything. He went as far as to (as an adult and highly regarded teacher, public speaker, prophet, with an itinerant national ministry) declare that he said *nothing* that his Father did not tell him to say first. And yet, though obedient, he suffered. And think about this: ***Because*** he was obedient, he suffered. But he had peace throughout. He was affirmed by his Father. And upon completing his life of obedience, he entered into the best life imaginable. Eternal honour and glory and majesty and approval from God the Father. And those who do not join in honouring Jesus' heavenly Father by trusting in the obedience and honouring which the Son performed for us, will enter into the worst life imaginable. Why would you make eternal suffering your choice to have independence, when the choice of obedience will give you eternal bliss...

Which leads to the last question we will answer. Why does this command matter so much to God? (significance of the command). Of course God deserves and demands obedience, and should be enough motivation. But I think there is a little more, aside from the promise we have been discussing that can help motivate us to act upon it. In the second command God goes into great detail in instructing the people of Israel to let no one and nothing compete with him for the glory and honour that is rightly and exclusively His. And just 3 commands later he is telling them to honour parents, above others... Shouldn't he be worried that we begin to worship our parents? Is God retracing his steps? He is not. In fact this command and principle point to the most important and vital of all parent/child relationships. The command to honour our parents prepares our hearts and postures them to receive instructions, care and guidance from and to give honour to our heavenly Father. It makes us dependent rather than independent; it gets us in the discipline of thinking that there is someone above us, greater than us, more worthy of honour than us. And so, it actually prepares us to receive, and after that to live the gospel, where we must be dependent, and must honour our heavenly Father.

One last matter in conclusion. The hard cases. Your parents are unbelievers and want you to lie, or cheat on a test. Or your relationship with them is racked with pain that has been inflicted on you, you were physically, emotionally or sexually abused by a parent, your parents divorced and you were abandoned either physically or emotionally, you parent has wounded you. Then what do we do? Each case will be unique and require delicacy and wisdom to navigate. Sometimes you may have to disobey parents to obey God, and they may feel dishonoured in spite of a heart that would like to honour.. What we learned today is that we honour parents to honour God, and that it places us in a place of blessing. I am not advocating you look stoically past your parents to God, but look at them with the mercy and pity of

the God whom you live to serve and honour. We don't want to lose out on the grace available by honouring our mom and dad. I think God can show you ways to honour your parents, no matter what. It may be unwise or even dangerous to be around them. But could you then pray for that parent that hurt you so much, can you speak well of their memory if they have died, even by finding one little thing they did that was admirable and rehearse it back to God as a prayer of thanksgiving? Can you cast yourself on God, with fear and trembling and say, 'I do not know how to do this, but I tremble to disobey you. Can you show me how? Because I want what you are offering and I long for, and I need your blessing"