

09.17.2017

Close of the Commandments

Exodus 20:5-6

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Come with me to Croatia—there's so much to see! There's the beautiful beaches on the Adriatic. The cascading waterfalls and lush parks. There's historic churches and monasteries. Even Diocletian's Palace is there. But today, what I really want us to visit is The Museum of Broken Relationships. Yes, you heard me right—there's actually such a thing—in 2010 The Museum of Broken Relationships was established. Founded by a pair of local artists, who were formerly lovers, this museum is home to an array of artifacts that each tell a heartbreak story.

Let us go in then. After paying admission and walking through the turnstile—oh, and take note of where the bathrooms are, by the way—the first exhibit that confronts us is called “Wedding Dress in a Jar.” Beside it, there's a description—it explains that the dress crammed inside the pickle jar represents how stuck this couple felt, how trapped they both were after five years of marriage. As we move on, the next exhibit we come to is a rare bottle of wine. The plaque next to this one describes how both parties always looked forward to toasting their new relationship with this very bottle the day they would each leave their spouses. But alas, the affair ended, nobody got a divorce, and the wine still sits there . . . unopened. Next, we find a display with a prosthetic limb, the lower half of a leg and foot. Here, we learn that a patient had fallen for a young social worker during his stay in the hospital, but after their passion had fizzled all he had left was this prosthetic memento as fake as their love turned out to be. After that, we come across a lawn gnome, its front badly cracked, broken, and marred. It's what remains after a lover's quarrel, one that involved the conveniently placed lawn gnome and the windshield of a brand new car. Seriously, that's what you'll find at this museum. And glancing around, there's much more to see: notes, letters, souvenirs, evidence of loves that met a tragic end. But before our brief tour comes to a close, I'm sure you want to know about the axe hanging up on the wall. It was a therapeutic tool used by its owner to chop up the furniture of the man who had left for another woman.

Okay, that was fun—hope you enjoyed it. But as you and I exit out the museum doors, I've just had a thought. What if there wasn't just a Museum of Broken Relationships in Croatia, but what if God Himself had established such a one in His own kingdom? What if it contained all the remnants of the relationships He had with His people, what do you think we would find there? Use your mind's eye now for a second and imagine what you'd see. For me, I could just picture a display of some preserved fruit from antiquity, two bite marks remaining—one Adam's, one Eve's. Or maybe we'd stumble on some piece of sculpture, a foot or a hand maybe, left from one of Israel's many idols. Or wouldn't it be interesting to see a pile of the very same silver coins for which Judas betrayed Jesus. But what else d'ya think we'd find?

Of course *our* relationship with God hasn't always been roses either, has it? So, do you think any of *us* might have a display of our own there? What would it be? What's stood in our way of getting close to God? What's come between Him and us? Would it be an object, a person, maybe the evidence of some particular sin? Only you know, of course . . . and well, God too. But, whatever it is, just think of it on display there at God's Museum of Broken Relationships.

No matter what it might be for you personally, there's one display that would suit all of us—the Ten Commandments. There'd be those two stone tablets, broken down the middle, with all Ten Commandments chiseled in Hebrew. Its stone symbolizing our hardened hearts, its two broken halves representing our brokenness with God. At least for me that's what comes to mind today after hearing the Close of the Commandments. This Close pretty much sums up what happens if we keep them . . . and what happens if we don't. Here are those words again—“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” Didja get that, “punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the *third and fourth* generation?!” It's enough to make us completely miss that second part—“But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” I mean, who's still listening when we're so worried about how God's going to punish us as well as our *great-grandchildren* for breaking His commandments!

So, do we dare set foot in that museum? I mean, if we have our own exhibit there—and of course we would—do we have the guts to show our faces? Well, I for one can't help it—I have some weird curiosity. I just really want to see what sort of display God has set up in His museum. And as we pull in and find a place to park, as we walk up to the main

entrance and open the front door, right away you and I are caught off guard. Why, it's a museum alright, but where are all the exhibits?

Taking a few more steps we find just one big exhibition smack dab in the middle. Looking this way and that, this is all we see. Right before us, stands two long roughhewn beams of wood, forming a cross. Getting closer, you can still see where the nails were at each end. And it's even stained from the blood. Looking at the description next to it, we read—"This is the very cross where I lost My one and only Son"—it's signed *God*. Reading on, we're directed to push a button next to the display to hear the audio recording of this broken relationship . . . so, here goes. [Press button] Out of some speaker we hear, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me!" And I'm left scratching my head, wondering just what kind of museum is this, exactly? Walking back out the front door, we look up at the lettering overhead—it reads, Museum of *Repaired Relationships*. But we just read about God's broken relationship with His Son on the cross . . .

Y'know, I just thought of something Luther once said—there was this one time when he called "Christ . . . the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, [you-name-it] that ever lived. He, being the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, was anything but innocent, without sin, but bearing every sin ever committed . . . [Christ] became a sinner[—the *only* sinner]." Luther goes on—"Our most merciful Father . . . sent His only Son into the world and laid on Him . . . the sins of all men saying, 'Be Thou Peter, the denier; be Paul, the persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; be David, that adulterer; be Adam who ate the fruit in Paradise; be the thief who hanged on the cross; and simply put, be everyone who's ever committed any sin. See that You pay for them and make satisfaction for all of them . . . By this, the whole world is purged and cleansed from sin.'" Could that maybe be how God has already kept His first promise in the Close of the Commandments—y'know, "I'm a jealous God, and I punish the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me"?

God punished sin alright, but it was when His Son came down to earth, took on the sins of all mankind, suffered in our place, that *He* bore the punishment we deserved. But Luther's not done yet, as he wraps things up, you can almost hear the joy in his heart as he says, "Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am Your sin. You have taken upon Yourself what is mine, and given me what is Yours. You became what You were not, so that I might become what I was not." It's no wonder none of us here—or *anywhere*—have an exhibit at God's museum. Because of the cross, God no longer has any unfinished business with the world, no more beef with us. The account is cleared. Nothing is pending. You and I, we are all squared up with God. Just unconditional grace, no strings attached. Thanks to Jesus, our relationship is repaired.

Okay, so that takes care of wiping the slate clean for us as far as our *breaking* the Commandments. But what about actually *keeping* them? I mean, let's not again gloss over God's second promise in the Close of the Commandments, y'know, where He says, "But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and *keep* My commandments." I mean, we still haven't kept them all, fulfilled them perfectly, right?

Well, here's something—if Jesus only had to die for us, He could've gotten that out of the way a lot sooner, couldn't He? But no, Jesus not only died for us, but He also *lived* for us too. Which means that every good and perfect thought in His head, each good and perfect word out of His mouth, all the good and perfect ways He loved and served His neighbor, that was all for your benefit, all done on your behalf. Just think, Jesus had no other gods, but only God. He never misused God's name, but always got it right every time. He always remembered the Sabbath. Always honored His father and mother and all other authorities. He never murdered, but always helped. He was never unfaithful, but always stayed true. He never stole a thing, but always gave everything away. He never said anything bad about anybody, but was always a friend . . . even of sinners. He never had a covetous bone in His body either. Could it be that when He exchanged your rags for His riches, your sin for His righteousness, your punishment for His blessedness, that this perfect life He lived was actually made yours too? Imagine, He's credited you with it all! Your account with God is full to bursting! Never will you fall short, but having loved God and kept His Commandments perfectly in Jesus, God now shows *you* love!

This cross exhibit, I've never seen anything so wonderful—the proof of our repaired relationship with God! But how do we know for sure that it's a permanent exhibit, one that will never change, never be taken down? Well, there was this one other museum I'll never forget—it was unlike any museum I'd ever seen before. Instead of just looking at exhibits

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displayed behind glass, it was more of an experience. You could see it, smell it, hear it, taste it, touch it—it was completely interactive. You didn't just learn about stuff, but it was like you were right there.

I'm talking, of course, about Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. It felt more like a theme park than a boring, dusty ol' museum. There was a coal mine exhibit where you practically got to do some mining yourself, even travel in a coal car. Then you could feel the physics and consider the chemistry of natural phenomena, like tornados and avalanches. There's even a spot where you can learn about DNA while observing a hatchery complete with little baby chicks.

But y'know, the Church is kinda like that—God's Museum of Repaired Relationships on earth. Here you'll always find that cross on display. And this cross isn't just here to look at or just for contemplation, no this exhibit is completely hands-on. Yes, the cross is a traveling exhibit, touring around the world and making a stop right here in Atlanta every Sunday, and it is quite the experience. See, this cross—its blessings and benefits, its boundless grace and limitless mercy—is put in your palm, applied to you, it is yours for keeps. Shortly, as you drop to this altar, you will get a feast for the senses as Christ's body and blood that hung on that cross—the very same that lived for you and died for you—is put on you and in you and goes with you. This cross still stands tall, stretches so wide, reaches out to you. It's always here, always for you, always patching things up.

So, let me be the first one to welcome you to God's interactive Museum of Repaired Relationships!