

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
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“The Ten Commandments” series

Exodus 20:15

“You Shall Not Steal!” – A Good Reminder

- 1.** A reminder of where your possessions come from
- 2.** A reminder that you should not rob anyone

Hymns: 487 – Closing: 250

All Scripture quotations from the NIV.

“You shall not steal.” Exodus 20:15

Do you recognize the men in the picture on the screen up here? If you’re a fan of the Old Wild West, you might. Pictured are Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Butch Cassidy was born to a Mormon couple in Utah in 1866, the oldest of 13 children. Butch was the notorious leader of the Wild Bunch gang, who robbed trains and banks. The Sundance Kid, a native of Pennsylvania, joined the Wild Bunch in 1896. In 1901 the pair fled to South America where their life of crime and flight continued.

How about this next pair of men? These two are none other than Jesse James and his brother Frank James. Wikipedia® calls Jesse James an “American outlaw, gang leader, bank robber, train robber, and murderer from the state of Missouri... Already a celebrity when he was alive, he became a legendary figure of the Wild West after his death.” Their most memorable heist was robbing the Northfield, MN, bank. That job went bad, though, when the bank’s cashier refused to open the safe. A week later, a posse killed or captured all the other outlaws except the James brothers, who only made off with \$26.70.

How about one more: Do you recognize this person? You would have to be a real

American history buff to know her. This is Belle Starr, another notorious figure. She served as a teenage spy for the Confederacy in the Civil War. She was influenced by the James Gang, who would hide out at her place at times. She immersed herself in organizing and planning robberies with horse thieves and whiskey bootleggers. She became rich enough to buy off the lawmen who were searching for her and those she harbored.

It’s interesting what history has done with such outlaws and robbers. Songs have been written about them. Movies have been made about them, many of them sympathetic to their stories. The 1969 movie “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,” starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman was a smash hit. You can go see Belle Starr’s statue at Woolaroc, OK. 138 nickel and dime novels were written about Jesse James at the turn of the century, and a movie starring Brad Pitt came out in 2007. What unfortunate encouragement can come from lionizing robbery!

What does God’s Word tell us about taking what is not ours? “You shall not steal!” This serves as a good reminder for us today:

- 1. A reminder where your possessions actually come from**
- 2. A reminder that you should not rob anyone**

1 – Let’s begin at the proper place in studying this commandment: Where do our material possessions come from? Here are some Scripture verses that tell us:

- *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*
(James 1:17)
- *“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”*
(Psalm 145:15,16)

- *“Your Father in heaven... causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45)*

There is no doubt about it. All things come from our good and merciful Father in heaven.

This seems pretty elementary. Why would we need to review that fact today? The sad fact is that this is much different from the way the world thinks. How many people aren't there in our world who truly believe that they are earning or acquiring all they have by their own efforts? How often aren't we ourselves oblivious?

The story's been told of a group of scientists in the future who decided that they had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell God that they were done with him. The scientist walked up to God and said, "God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so you can go do whatever you'd like." God listened very patiently and kindly to the man and after the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well, how about this? Let's say we have a man-making contest." The scientist replied, "OK, great!" But God added, "Now, we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam." The scientist said, "Sure, no problem! We can do that these days!" and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt. God looked at him and said, "Get your own dirt!"

We don't make the ground we walk on, the air we breathe, or the beauty that we marvel at! And with our personal possessions, every paycheck we receive should be co-signed by our boss and the Lord. Every car we drive should be considered "on loan" from the Lord. Every house we live in has a gracious landlord, the Lord himself, who lets us live there. When we realize this, we are on our way to a proper attitude about our possessions!

How does the Lord give us what we materially need? 2 Thessalonians says, *"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."* God's normal way of people being provided for is by giving people skills and energy to use at a job. Don't

think you need to sit at home and wait for delivery people to start bringing things to your door! This puts a different perspective on what you do each day.

We read another way God gives us possessions: *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11)* We also acquire things purely by gifts and inheritance.

How good our God is to us! Yet when it comes to our job, how often people can be tempted toward laziness. Perhaps they just don't feel like putting in the effort on a certain day. Or they're told to "slow down!" by some of their co-workers. What does God say about working industriously? Colossians 3 tells us, *"Obey your earthly master... not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."* If you do not work hard at your job and do what is expected, that is stealing!

Additionally, how quick we can be to complain. Do you complain about your job? And how often don't we complain about what God has chosen to give (or not give) us? For example, if I were to give away this chocolate bar today, I'd imagine I'd have a lot of children very excited to receive it. Hands would go up. Begging would commence. Jealousy would be felt by those who did not receive it. But then imagine that I was going to give a second candy bar away, just like this jumbo-sized half pound chocolate bar. What would the first person say? "That's not fair! I don't want the one you gave me!" Such is human nature when it comes to things that are big as a house or a vehicle.

When it comes to a proper perspective on earthly possessions, we have the perfect example. We have someone to look to in inspiring us properly. It's none other than Jesus! What was Jesus' attitude toward the possessions of this world? Remember, this is the One who reminded his disciples that foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but he had no place to even call home! Jesus said, *"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life*

more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" (Matthew 6:25-27)

Jesus well knew that his heavenly Father would provide for him, and he knew that he had a deeper mission to be focused on, the spiritual mission of winning the salvation of the world. Jesus focused mainly on the spiritual goals that lay before him. He had a ministry to do and he had a cross that lay before him, where he would suffer and die for the sin of the world!

Thank God we can point to this today. For when we see our oblivion, laziness, and complaints, we can confess them to our Savior and receive forgiveness because of his mission that led to the cross. We are forgiven because Christ laid down his life for our sins!

2 – We have one other fact to be reminded of in the 7th Commandment today. We have clearly learned how our material possessions come from God, but we haven't finished off the crux of this commandment, which tells us, "**You shall not steal!**" Don't be robbing anyone!

"OK! OK!" you say. "I won't rob anyone. No bank holdups in my future. No mugging a woman on the street. No going into my dad's or spouse's wallet!" But that's the obvious. Are there ways you might be tempted to rob someone, which isn't so flagrant?

Let's look at some Scripture verses that fit our thoughts today:

- *"Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity." (Leviticus 19:35)* Does this fit you? Are you dishonest? Do you talk a slick game? Are you a robber?
- *"A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare." (Proverbs 21:6)* Do you go for the dishonest discount? Do you lie about what you owe?

- "The real, full-price membership I should be paying is too much anyway"
- "My neighbor won't mind me using his Internet signal"
- Are you a robber?
- *"The wicked borrow, and do not repay." (Psalm 37:21)* Does this fit you? Do you think, "No one will miss this any way." Have you robbed your neighbor?
- *"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:8)* Parents, do you rob your family? How disgraceful it is if the parents have the best of clothes, electronic equipment, and vacations and their children run around with the least of everything, poorly provided for.
- *"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (1 John 3:17)* Do you rob the needy? The Lord expects us to help the needy. If there is never a time of year where you support a charity that assists those in need, how can you claim to have God's love?
- *"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21)* Do you rob your government? Even in Jesus' day, when the corrupt Roman government was in charge and the corrupt tax collectors who were despised were at work, Jesus said that taxes were to be paid! We have a responsibility to our government to support it with our taxes.

Don't rob people!

However, one more warning is fitting today. Malachi 3 says, *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* Do you rob God? Some people don't like to hear the topic of church offerings preached, but our topic of robbery today requires it. Do you bring your firstfruit offerings? Do you bring them generously, trusting God to provide? Do you bring them cheerfully? **Or are you robbing God?**

Suddenly, with all these aspects of robbing others, we see that there is more to the 7th Commandment than might first appear. And your thoughts might be, "Who is up to the task of never robbing? How can I provide for God's house, my family, the needy, the government? How can I do it all? Will I ever have enough?"

When your thoughts turn in this direction, think about the salvation that God has provided, which came at a high cost. Remember what he has invested in you so you could be his child and live with him in heaven one day. And then trust him for the future. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)*

As we close our look at robbery, we could ask, "What happens to robbers?" I could tell you what happened to the famous robbers I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon. Jesse James was shot in his home by a friend who betrayed him. At age 34, when he put his guns down and was adjusting a picture on the wall, he was shot from behind. Belle Starr was ambushed and murdered on her horse at age 40. No one found out who did it. And Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid? We're not sure, but legends abound about their demise as well. Robbers die. In God's book unrepentant robbers of all kinds will be lost forever, away from God's presence.

May we take the 7th Commandment to heart today: "You Shall Not Steal!" May we always remember where our possessions come from. And may we forsake all thoughts of robbing others for

our benefit. May our Lord Jesus who gave his all for our salvation motivate us to do so! Amen.