

Expectations: God First

Exodus 20:2-7

April 27, 2025

Rev Joe Sanders

First Baptist Church Coshocton, Ohio

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. God's expectation of Moses was that he would lead the people out of slavery. God's expectation of the people was that they worship Him, teach their children, and their children's children through every generation to worship Him. God made His expectations clear by appearing in a cloud surrounding a mountain, and giving Moses ten commandments.

Exodus 20:2–7 (ESV) “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”

Reputation, Possessions, and Family: all things need to be secondary to God. These verses capture the first three of the ten commandments: Only God; no idols; and missing using God's name. We are guilty of breaking all three. I don't have to explain it because we all know that it is true.

These commands were given to show us that we can't keep them. But more importantly to let us know what God expects. His expectations are for everyone who breathes. No one is exempt. The Lord God, Yahweh Elohim, not only rescued us from slavery to sin, but is the one who gave us life.

His expectations are of highest concern for us. Through His expectations we begin to see how we might choose to live our lives. As we live according to His expectations we find purpose and meaning in our lives. By seeking to live out His expectations our relationship with God becomes a better relationship. The Lord God made us to be in relationship with one another and with God.

When God's people were slaves in Egypt, the ruler of Egypt Pharaoh proclaimed himself to be a god. The people of Egypt worshiped Pharaoh. It was important for God's people to know that was not e for them. Pharaoh was not a god, but was an ordinary man. No man could be god, no man is like God. No person, regardless of their talents, charisma, power or influence is a god. No person is worthy of taking the place of God.

The Lord God is first and cannot be second. He is always first. He is always God.

The Lord makes a list of physical idols, today our idols are the same but different. Images of things in the heavens, on the land and in the sea are mentioned. These were the gods of the Egyptian people. They are the gods Pharaoh proclaimed as his equals. They were made of wood, stone, and metal. They were as useless as the material they were made from. But the people worshipped these idols because they represented the sun, the rain, the harvest, fertility, and power. How many people today

worship the idols of wealth, influence, power, reputation, and other people? We might as well ask how many people are there in the world?

We've made gods out of movie and tv actors, athletes, inventors, politicians, and other celebrities. We've made god's out of our cars, our houses, our pets, our clothes, and even our food. Pleasure, ambition, personal success, individual achievements and personal desires have become gods.

All of these have become of highest importance to us. So many more things have become first in our lives. The Lord God, our Creator and Savior has been down the list of value and importance to us.

Matthew 7:24–27 (ESV)

Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

We are our own worst enemy, the fool in the mirror is you and me. Every time we put God anyplace but first the sand starts to wash away from under our feet. There is a reason God demands to be first: what He says is true and reliable. Jesus spoke those words at the end of what we call the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes.

He had made clear through His message the essence of His ministry and how to fulfill God's commandments. Jesus lived His life following what He proclaimed in His message. He lived the truth. He is the truth. He is reliable. He is worthy of our worship, to be first in our lives.

There are a lot of lies and deception outside these four walls. Lies and deception don't make for a good foundation. Sooner or later the lies fall apart. They are like shifting sands. The people who deceive and speak lies fall apart. Anyone and everyone who believes the lies, follows the deception finds they are on unstable ground.

The troubles, the problems, the ups and downs, the waves, the earthquakes, the uncertainty of this world isn't going away. Then when we ask what went wrong, we only have to look in the mirror to see the fool.

We too often think our ideas, our plans, our actions are the most important. That means we have moved ourselves into first place and put God in some other place. Jesus has made it clear how to live our lives. What Jesus said is the truth. Jesus kept the Lord God first, so much so that we can see their relationship as Father and Son. Jesus believed the Father's words. Jesus followed the Father's words. Jesus proclaimed the Father's words.

Living on this side of the Cross the wisest thing we can do is keep our eyes on Jesus. But, we are too often looking at the ground beneath us as it shifts and slides. We get consumed by our present crisis, living one crisis to the next.

We take our eyes off of Jesus and we look at what's happened in the past. We want to go back and do it over whether it was good or bad. Our eyes get focused on perfection, complaining that nothing measures up. Demanding that perfection be met no matter the cost.

As human beings we stop looking at Jesus and start looking toward others for the answers. We trust in people as if they were our savior. We fail to recognize that the Savior of the world is waiting for us to return to Him.

Then the rain falls, the hurricane comes, the financial crisis hits, the earth shakes, and the house falls down. We wonder where is God. We blame God. We push God away. Yet, God is near. Jesus is close by. But, we've moved Him down the list of our priorities and we can't see Him.

Psalm 139:23–24 (ESV)

King David prayed “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! See if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

People who want God first in their lives willingly face His examination. David shared these words when His eyes moved off of himself and unto God. He spoke these words when He could look to God and not look at his circumstances. He praised God for being His creator. He gave thanks to God for knowing all about his life and every situation. He rejoiced that God was God and he was not. He trusted God to be merciful, loving, and full of grace.

When God is first in our lives we aren't satisfied in a status quo relationship with God. We want more of God in our lives. We are willing to rearrange our priorities and put Him first. We recognize the things that have taken over. So, we are ready to have them removed. As they are taken out of our lives we don't miss them, because we're focused on the goodness of God.

Let's grab a hold of the goodness of God. There is not a moment, a second, any division of second that God is not good. For all of eternity God is good. It is the very character of God to be good. God can only be true to His character. Good is defined as good because of God. Praise God for His goodness.

Just as there is no division of God that is not good, there is no division of God that is bad. That is not in His character. He has never been bad. At no time in all of eternity will He be bad. Praise God for His goodness.

You and I may look at our circumstances and see bad. God will use that circumstance for what is good. As a matter of fact before we saw that situation was bad, God was already working to bring good out of the problems. He was seeing through, and over, and past the bad to how you and I would be blessed by His goodness. Guess what? Praise God for His goodness.

No matter where you are in life right now God's goodness, grace, mercy, and love are waiting for you. Regardless of your age, young, old, or somewhere in between, God's goodness, grace, mercy, and love are waiting for you. In spite of how you view your life, the world, your circumstances God's goodness, grace, mercy, and love are waiting for you. Praise God, Praise God, Praise God.

As we decided that God is first in our lives we want to be more like Jesus than our sinful selves. You can be young and freewheeling, you can be more like Jesus. You can be old and content, satisfied sitting on your porch swing. You can be more like Jesus. You can be burdened by illnesses or financial concerns, family problems or career choices. You can be more like Jesus. Your life may be busy with activity or thoughts. You can be more like Jesus. Your attitude can be bored or bitter. You can be more like Jesus. You can see the world through rose colored glasses, or jaded by every crisis. You can be more like Jesus.

As you put God first in front of all the idols, call upon the name of Jesus to be your Savior, you will find that you have become more like Jesus. When you are slapped in the face by the next temptation, next burden, the next problem you realize that you want to be more like Jesus.

Philippians 4:4 (ESV) Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

For God to be first and your eyes to be on Jesus rejoice and rejoice and rejoice. Every bad thing that happens will result in negativity unless you thank God. You've been there, right? The stove blows up and every thought is negative. Will the house burn down? What will I do then? Are the kids okay?

But, as soon as you thank God your negative thoughts and words start moving in a new direction. All the questions, which seemed as high as a mountain, are no longer important. The burdens that once felt like a million tons, seem to be as light as a ping pong ball.

Thanking God in the midst of your crisis is not thanking God for the crisis. It is thanking God that God is God. You see when the crisis is god, then God is no longer in first place. But when you give thanks to God you are keeping Him in first place. You are trusting God to be good and take care of you. You are believing that God will bring what is good to your life.

Thanking God when your life is good is too easy. Anyone can do that. I've even heard sinners, unbelievers do that. Thanking God, rejoicing, is the sign that regardless of the attacks and temptations you face, you will keep your faith in God.

This is a conscious decision. You have to decided to give thanks. You have to make the choice that above all the things you are thinking, all of your body's normal reactions, that you will thank God.

You are giving thanks to God because He is the Lord, your God. I'm talking about the personal relationship we have with God through faith in Jesus Christ. I'm in a personal relationship because Jesus saved me from my sins. I'm still guilt of failing to keep God first. But, when I'm facing that crisis, Jesus through His Holy Spirit reminds that God is still on the throne, He is still the Lord of life, and He is still the Savior of the world.

Not one of us is perfect. We fail to keep God on the throne, first in our lives. Thank God for His love, mercy, grace, and goodness. Thank God that He told us He needs to always be first in our lives. Thank God that He expects us to trust Him as the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the one who is first.

Jesus has made it possible for you to be forgiven for putting God someplace other than first in your life. Jesus willingly gave His life as the only one who kept God first in every situation. Jesus willingly lived His life as the Son of God being true to His character as good. When Jesus gave up His life on the cross my sins and your sins – the sin of putting God second – were on Jesus. He has taken them away from you forever. You don't ever have to be under the power and control of sin. Jesus can set you free.

By His resurrection from the dead, Jesus made His power and authority available for your life. To put God first in your life, to be free of your sin, to be empowered you only need to call upon Jesus. Today, call out to Jesus to take away your sins, and give you a new life where God is first. Amen.