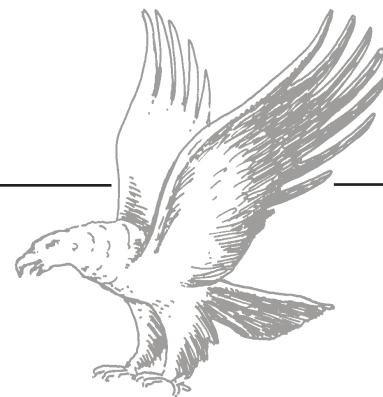


Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



March 4, 2018

Two Mountains, Two Sermons

Comparing the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount provides some important lessons about the nature of true holiness.

"Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die'" (Ex. 20:18-19).

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, . . ." (Matt. 5:1-2).



God spoke to the children of Israel from the summit of Mount Sinai. Jesus spoke to His disciples atop a small hill somewhere in Galilee. These two sermons, so similar in their settings, present an interesting contrast in *the psychology of motivation*.

God's sermon on Sinai was the first presentation of the Ten Commandments (the stone tablets version came later). This moral code targeted behaviors such as idolatry, murder, adultery, lying, stealing, and the like. Except for a handful of diehard skeptics, humanity has

generally recognized these moral absolutes as the foundation of a stable society. When societies live by this code, they tend to prosper; when they ignore this code, they decay and decline. In these Commandments, God was giving His people a sort of "quick reference guide" to give them a leg up on their competitors.

However, for all their value as a moral compass, the Ten Commandments had one shortcoming: By focusing on outward behaviors, they did little to address the hearts of the listeners. Two of the commandments hinted at the role of the heart (the first, "You shall have no other gods before Me"; and the last, "You shall not covet"). But on the whole, the emphasis was on mechanical performance. By addressing the *symptoms* of evil rather than the root, the Ten Commandments had limited effectiveness as a change agent for character development.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount takes the Ten Commandments to a higher level. On the topics of murder, adultery, swearing, charity, prayer, money, and a

variety of other issues, Jesus challenges His listeners to look beyond the outward behavior to the *attitude* behind the behavior. We can never change who we really are, He argues, without first changing how we *think*. The key to genuine holiness is not mere compliance to an external rule, but a wholesale restructuring of our mental framework. Fix what's broken on the inside, and the outside will follow naturally.

There is one more contrast that warrants our attention. Notice that when the Israelites heard God's thunderous voice from the mountaintop, they were terrified by the experience and begged Moses to intervene in God's behalf. When the Galilean carpenter finished His Sermon on the Mount, the audience was not terrified, but "astonished" at the simple authority of its message (Matt. 7:28-29). This was guidance that could change their lives from the inside out, and they appreciated Him for it.

Two mountains, two sermons—and two very different approaches to transforming our lives. Which approach is *your* life based on?

— David King



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