Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I began our tour of the Ten Commandments with a few comments about our overall attitude towards them. And I shared with you the words of Jen Wilkin from her book, ‘*Ten Words to Live By*.’ She said, “Lawfulness is Christlikeness. To obey the law is to look like Jesus Christ.” And I think that is a really helpful statement. It comes at the end of a general point she makes about our attitude towards the law. And I want to share the larger quote today:

*Perhaps you have heard the statement "Christianity isn't about rules, it's about relationship." It is an idea that has enjoyed popularity in recent decades, as evangelistic messages [have] increasingly emphasized a personal relationship with God, one made possible through the grace that forgives our sins against God's law. [And the way that this is always set up is to portray the law as the words of the grumpy God of the Old Testament, and grace as the relationship of the compassionate God of the New Testament].*

*[But this pits] … law and grace … against one another as enemies, when in fact, they are friends. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New … are one and the same. God does not change. His justice and compassion have always coexisted, and so have His law and His grace. Herein lies our forgetfulness. Rather than seeing the sin of lawlessness as the barrier to relationship with God, we have steadily grown to regard the law itself as the barrier. We have come to believe that rules prevent relationship.*

*So, is Christianity about rules, or is it about relationship? The Christian faith is absolutely about relationship. But while that faith is personal, it is also communal. We are saved into special relationship with God, and thereby into special relationship with other believers … and because this statement is true, Christianity is also unapologetically about rules, for rules show us how to live in those relationships. Rather than threaten relationship, rules enable it. We know this is true from everyday life. Imagine you are a substitute teacher at [a primary] school. Which … class would you rather substitute for: the one with established and respected rules posted on the bulletin board, or the one without? Rules ensure that the one in charge is honoured, and that those in her charge look to the interests of others as well as their own. Without rules, our hopes of healthy relationship vanish in short order. Jesus did not pit rules against relationship. It was He who said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

*Christians have been taught, with good reason, to fear legalism-attempting to earn favour through obedience to the law. Legalism is a terrible blight, as evidenced in the example of the Pharisees. But in our zeal to avoid legalism, we have at times forgotten the many places [in Scripture where] the beauty of the law is extolled for us, both in the Old Testament and the New. “Blessed,” says the psalmist, “is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord." [And so] While legalism is a blight, lawfulness is a blessed virtue, as evidenced in the example of Christ. We should love the law because we love Jesus, and because Jesus loved the law.*

Is that helpful? I hope it is. And so, as those who love Jesus, who loved the law, what does loving the Eighth Commandment look like? How do we break this commandment? Why should we not steal? Where is the cross of Christ in all this. And what does keeping the commandment look like? Well, this is what we will consider in our two major points.

1. And the first one is: **What is** **the eighth commandment and how do we *break* it**?
   1. The eighth commandment says, “*You shall not steal*.” And to give us some idea of how important this commandment is to God, immediately after the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, there are **three whole chapters** of commentary and detail and explanation *about this commandment*. God explained to the people of Israel what sorts of things were not to be stolen, how thieves were to be punished, and how much restitution a thief had to pay.
      1. And there was **one very obvious reason why this was necessary**. Can anyone tell us how the Ten Commandments begin? What is the preface to the Commandments? “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*.” The people of Israel had just been delivered from slavery. And slavery is a type of theft. Unsurprisingly then, it is the first type of theft that God forbids in **chapter 21. In verse 16** He said, “*Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death*.” So, the people of Israel were not to do to others what had been done to them.
         1. And this is true also today – we may not steal people by way of slavery. Sadly, though, slavery still happens today. It is part of some religions and cultures, where people are sold into slavery or marriage, and it is part of the wicked sex industry.
      2. But what is another reality for slaves? It is not owning anything or owning very little. In **Proverbs 30:8-9**, the teacher said, “*Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God*.” For those in slavery or poverty, the temptation to steal is very strong. And it may have been an everyday part of life for the Israelites. After all, the Egyptians were wicked oppressors who were rich. So, where was the harm? And so, God warned the people of Israel against stealing the property and possessions of others. And this is what is in view in our Lord’s Day where it says that the eight commandment forbids “*outright theft and robbery*.” There is zero justification for what we see on the nightly news – the ram raids of dairies and vape stores and liquor stores and jewellery stores and supermarkets. We may not steal what belongs to others – period.
      3. But our Lord’s Day helpfully expands our understanding of what this commandment forbids by including reference to “inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume, fraudulent merchandising, counterfeit money, excessive interest, or any other means forbidden by God. In addition, He forbids all greed and pointless squandering of His gifts.”
   2. Now, I hope that most of us understand what is in view with those things. We may look more closely at them another time, but what I want to do now is to highlight **two biblical examples of stealing** to show how serious this sin is in the sight of God. And *when* this stealing took place and *how God dealt with* it is powerfully instructive.
      1. The first one is the account of **Achan**. The people of Israel had just entered the Promised Land. Here they were to become God’s special covenant people. Here they were to live according to His law. And so, as they faced their first conquest, the city of Jericho, God told them that they were not allowed to take any spoils of war. Well, many of you will know what happened. A man named Achan “*saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels … [and he] took them … [and hid them] in the earth inside [his] tent*.” And do you boys and girls remember what happened to Achan? All the people took Achan “*and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had*,” and “*they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones*.” So, at this pivotal time in the history of Israel, God made an example of Achan to teach His people, among other things, just how seriously He views stealing.
      2. The second example comes from the very early days of the New Testament church. It is the account of **Ananias and Sapphira**. They sold a piece of property and brought *some* of the proceeds of the sale to the Apostles as a gift to the church. And if they had said it was *some* of the proceeds, that would have been fine. For this was a voluntary offering. But they lied and said that what they brought was the full amount. And Peter asked them why they had “kept back” some of the proceeds? And the Greek word he used has fraud or embezzlement in view. And so, Ananias and Sapphira were stealing from God and from needy Christians. And for their sins, both Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead on the spot. So, again, at another pivotal time in the history of God’s people, God made an example of this man and his wife to impress upon the church, amongst other things, how important it is not to steal.
         1. And just as a side note, when you read this NT account, you have to wonder how people fall for the notion that the God of the OT is grumpy and the God of the New Testament is gracious. God does not change!
   3. So… you know those items from the hotel you stayed at, which you took? That’s stealing. And the pens in your handbag or the flash-drive in your pocket that you ‘collected’? Stealing. And the excuse that the software company or department store is a huge corporation that won’t miss what you took? Stealing. And the inaccurate description of the item you are trying to sell on Facebook marketplace or Trade-me? Stealing. Copying someone else’s material, whether they be a real person or chat-GPT, for your essay at school? Stealing. That insurance claim where you added a few items or told a half-truth? Stealing. Adding an extra hour to your time sheet at work? Stealing. Scrolling through Tiktoks when the boss is not looking? Stealing. And whether it is these exact things or others like it, I trust you can see that we are all Eighth Commandment breakers, every single one of us, many times over.
2. So, as our second point, **how do we *keep* the eighth commandment**?
   1. Well, there are Eighth Commandment attitudes and actions that we should cultivate in our lives that do please the Lord. And we will come to those in a moment. But **the correct place to begin is confession of sin and faith**. We must confess our sins against the Eighth Commandment and rest in the obedience of Jesus Christ, who perfectly kept the Eighth Commandment, on our behalf, and who paid the price for all our Eighth Commandment sins on the cross. And of course, this is true too for all the commandments. So, commandment keeping looks to Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith. It *rests* in Him. It *trusts* in Him. It *receives* Him. And I hope this is true of each one of you today.
      1. And I don’t know if you have thought about this before, but the Eighth Commandment has a fascinating connection to the cross. **For what was the crime of the two men who were crucified with Jesus? They were thieves!** And you might remember that one of them rebuked Jesus, but the other one said to him *“"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*” So, because this thief trusted in Jesus, He received forgiveness and eternal life! And you can too if you confess your sins and believe!

* 1. But another important connection between this commandment and Christ and us is that all those who believe in Christ become **a united with Jesus person**. And our union with Jesus is a prominent teaching of the New Testament. And one aspect of our union with Jesus that the American theologian Jonathan Edwards described is this:

*By virtue of the believer's union with Christ, he [or she] does in fact possess all things. But it may be asked, how does he possess all things? What is he the better for it? How is a true Christian so much richer than other people?*

*To answer this, I'll tell you what I mean by "possessing all things." I mean that God three in one, all that He is, and all that He has, and all that He does, all that He has made or done in the whole universe, bodies and spirits, earth and heaven, angels, humans and devils, sun, moon and stars, land and sea, fish and [birds], all silver and gold, kings and [rulers] are as much the Christian's as the money in his pocket, the clothes he wears, the house he dwells in, or the [food] he eats; yes, properly his, advantageously his, by virtue of the union with Christ; because Christ, who certainly does possess all things, is entirely his: so that the Christian possesses it all, more than a wife the share of the best and dearest husband, more than the hand possesses what the head does. It is all his.*

*Every atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian, every particle of air or every ray of the sun; so that he in the other world, when he comes to see it, shall sit and enjoy all this vast inheritance with surprising, amazing joy.*

Isn’t that a wonderful truth? It is surely what Jesus had in view when He said, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*.” If you are in Christ, you possess all things, in Him. And that makes stealing utterly foolish! It is to pretend that you do not have enough in Christ.

* 1. And because all our sins are forgiven, and because we are united with Christ, we must, as our Lord’s Day says, “Do whatever I can for my neighbour’s good … treat him as I would like him to treat me, and … work faithfully so that I may share with those in need.”
     1. And perhaps you recognized those last words as coming from what we read earlier in **Ephesians 4:28**: As those who have learned Christ, who are putting off the old self and putting on the new self,letus“*no longer steal, but rather let [us] labour, doing honest work with [our] own hands, so that [we] may have something to share with anyone in need*.”
     2. You see, when, for Christ’s sake, you work, in order to be able to share with those who are in need, you are making Christ and others your treasure rather than toys. Kevin de Young put it this way in his commentary on the Eighth Commandment:

*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. But the reverse is also true: where your treasure goes, your heart tends to follow. If you put all your treasure into your stuff – your toys, your man cave, your exercise room, [your house or your hobbies or your car] – then your heart is going to go there. If you’re having a hard time getting your heart in the right place, then send your money ahead of it. Your heart will follow. When you give generously to the church and to other kingdom-minded causes and organizations, you start finding that your heart is interested in what is happening.*

* + 1. And as a case in point, who here remembers what our special collection was for? It was in the bulletin and it was announced the week before so that we could prayerfully think about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ work and how much we might be able to give in support of their kingdom work. Who did that? And I ask this because if you’re like me, you spent a fair chunk of coin during the week on coffee or takeaways or toys and hobbies and entertainments, without even blinking an eye-lid. And you probably spent at least some time thinking about your bank account or your mortgage structure or your investments… But we never made time to prayerfully consider our support of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And it is things like this where Jesus’ words about treasure need to hit home.

Brothers and Sisters, the ’secret’ to Eighth Commandment keeping, then, as we will sing in a moment, is knowing Jesus Christ as your priceless treasure. And then valuing what He values as your supreme treasure. He came to give His life as a ransom for many. And He does not want us to be tight-fisted takers but generous givers. May He fill our hearts and minds with Himself and all that we possess in Him, so that we are eager to please our Father in heaven by striving to keep the Eighth Commandment. Amen.