

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Glory.

Luke 10:25-28 Exodus 20: 1-21

1. Smoke and Thunder
2. Smoke and Mirrors
3. Smoke and Smiles

Introduction:

Ellie and I have been recording lots of music. Most of it for you all.

Recording music is fascinating. You can play a jazz concert at a bar. People are chatting. Waitresses bring cocktails. And the jazz band is playing. If you play a wrong note, no one will notice.

Ellie and I used to play at coffee houses. When the milk frother starts going, you can't hear the mistakes.

But then you go into the recording studio. The microphone hides *nothing*.

There's a certain *deal* that a musician and a record producer make.

"Okay, producer: you are the only one who can ever know how *human* I am. That I sometimes sing out of tune. That my guitar playing can be clumsy. No one hears the real me but you.

"In exchange for this radical vulnerability, you've got to make me sound good.

"I'll trade the radical vulnerability of the studio for the glory that I'll get from my adoring fans when they hear this record I've made."

But now: We've got the software and the gear to record music at home. Guess what that means. I don't have to get musically "naked" in front of a music producer. I can spend one hour recording, and then spend five hours making myself sound *amazing*. If I make a guitar mistake, I can copy-and-paste a decent guitar part. I sing out of tune, but I can use the auto-tune software to correct my pitch.

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Then, on Sunday, while we're all trying to enter into God's presence, and you hear the music we've made ... you'll think "wow, great stuff, Pastor! How nice to have a musical pastor!"

See, I *want* to look good, sound good, be good. And you know what? That's okay! We were *made* for goodness. We were made for *glory*!

But Paul says that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Our relationship to glory is complicated now. We want it, but we can't handle it. We desire it, but we know we don't deserve it. We long to be authentically glorious, but we're spending so much time and energy manufacturing faux glory.

That's what the first commandment is about. "Treasure my glory," the Father's first Good Word says to us. Have no other gods before me—in my presence.

Whenever there's glory in the Bible, there tends to be smoke, and other stuff. Let's look at the smoke and the other stuff.

First we'll look at Smoke and Thunder. Then Smoke and Mirrors. Then Smoke and Smiles.

1. Smoke and Thunder

At the end of the Ten Words, in Exodus 20:18-21, we see the smoke. And hear the thunder. And see the lightning. The people of Israel are trembling with fear.

And they say: "Moses: you talk to God. We'll stay *way way* back here. We can't bear the presence of God's glory."

God had summoned Israel to the mountain of his glory. You *have* to come near, to hear and see.

But the Israelites know they can't come *too near*, or they'll die (19). God had warned them of this in chapter 19.

"I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of slavery in Egypt. I showed my glory in the face of Pharaoh. You saw it."

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Yep, the Israelites say. We saw it. And we're seeing it again. It's too much for us.

Israel is being called into the recording studio. Pharaoh's pathetic flaws had been exposed to the scrutiny of the record producer's all-hearing microphone. They don't want to go into the recording booth and have that microphone held up to their own hearts, souls, and lives. They can't bear the exposure.

God is saying "you're going to be my treasured possession. I'm going to fulfill my plans and promises through you."

They're saying "Oh man. Please, no. Not us. We can't bear this kind of glory. We're not worthy of it. We can never be authentically glorious. And we are terrified of you."

Friends, you and I were made fearfully and wonderfully. The image of God. Female and Male. To reflect God's glory and even to serve and rule the world. This terrifies us. And our terror is real. Because we have fallen way, way short of God's glory.

Smoke and Thunder? No thanks. We'd rather miss out on God's glory than have our own ingloriousness exposed, even just to God.

2. Smoke and Mirrors

So what do we do instead? Smoke and Thunder? No. We try Smoke and Mirrors.

We say, because I can't handle God's glory, I'll settle for a simulacrum of glory. Manufactured, instead of reflected, glory.

And I'll do it by my own means.

Ellie cleaned out my walk-in closet, and now there's room for our little "recording studio" In there. My jackets and trousers and socks muffle the sound just like a real studio. ;-)

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So now I can close myself up in there. Record. Cover up all my mistakes with cut-and-paste technology. Auto-tune my voice. And come out and say, “hey kids, wanna hear my song?”

I don't have to be exposed. I can do it myself.

We will work so hard to cover our glory shortfall.

Now, what if I can't do it — manufacture glory — by myself? Well, then I'll use the gods of money, attraction, and power to get it done for me. I'll make alliances. Deals. I'll serve the gods of approval, and in exchange, they'll keep me feeling safe, loved, treasured, confident.

Smoke and Mirrors!!

This is an example of what Luther says.

When you break any commandment, you've broken the first one. Why do I steal or lie or cheat? Because I'm trying to *use* my neighbor to *get* something — *glory!* — that only God really has and only God as Father will share in the relationship of Father-Son love!

If I meticulously apply auto-tune to my voice on GarageBand because I am willing to work to get your praise and approval, I've broken the first commandment! I've brought the false god of people's approval into the presence of the one true Lord of Heaven and Earth.

If you cheat to get into Gymmie, or pad your resume with inflated or fabricated achievements, or nurture a secret romance outside of your marriage, you're making a deal with a false god of approval, and the false god of approval will always let you down and never let you rest.

And worst of all, by making your allegiance with the false god of approval, you're saying to the God of the Universe: “You know what? I don't treasure your glory. I'd rather have the smoke-and-mirrors semblance of glory than real approval in your presence of real glory.”

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What are the gods you're bringing into the presence of your God and Father? What deals are you making, which you know are *bad* deals? Whose approval are you trying to manufacture and turn into glory? Are you ready to stop with the smoke-and-mirrors? Are you ready to admit that you're tone-deaf and stop auto-tuning your life?

3. Smoke and Smiles

So we've gone to the foot of the mountain and witnessed the Smoke and Thunder of God's glory. We've tried to manufacture a substitute glory with our Smoke and Mirrors.

Let's go up another mountain: The Mount of Transfiguration. It is recorded in 3 of the gospels.

What happens on that mountain? A cloud or smoke descends. Jesus' face changes. His clothes become bright as a flash of lightning. Moses and Elijah—the law-giver and the covenant lawyer, appear in glorious splendor. And they're talking with Jesus about the Exodus. Not the Exodus Moses led. Exodus Part II. Jesus' Exodus in Jerusalem, where he leads his people out of bondage from their sin and gives them new hearts with which to serve and glorify God.

It's a hilarious story, despite all the terrifying glory. Why?

Because Peter, James, and John are super awkward. They're sleeping while Jesus is praying. They wake up, they see all this terrifying glory.

And—like every human being before them and every human being after them— They know they're supposed to reflect the uncreated light of Jesus' glory like Moses and Elijah are doing. But they also know they're just dudes— Peter, James, John.

So Peter speaks up: "Master, it's good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." And then Luke adds this hilarious line: "He did not know what he was saying."

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It's like if you've written and recorded some songs, used a fair amount of auto-tune, released them, and then you wake up and suddenly U2 or Luciano Pavoratti want to take you on tour with them as their opening act.

"Uh, great, yeah ..." and you're definitely going to say some awkward and stupid things because you know this is the kind of thing you've always dreamed about, but you know you don't belong.

And here's where it gets really cool.

Moses had met God while he was shepherding sheep on Mount Sinai. The bush burned, but didn't burn up. There's fire. There's smoke. Moses wanted to get closer, but both he and God knew he couldn't because of the presence of God's glory.

Years later, Moses and Israel are at that same mountain. There's fire, there's smoke. There's God's voice. And this time God summarizes the contents of his own heart and character in Ten Good Words.

Jesus, maybe on Mount Zion, is questioned by a lawyer about God's law. Jesus says yep, the Ten Good Words can be summarized with Two Good Words: Love God. Love your Neighbor.

Then, Peter, James, and John are up on this mountain where Jesus is transfigured. There's smoke, there's fire, there's the voice of God. And God the Father summarizes the two great commandments, the ten commandments, the whole law, and the entirety of his own heart with One Good Word: "This is my beloved Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" All the law summarized in one word. In one smile.

"Listen to him."

When we hear this One Good Word from the Father (and it's Jesus!), and when we see the Father's smile (on Jesus!), we realize that the Father is giving us an invitation and command. What is it?

That we (1) shut up with our excuses for why we can't handle God's glory. We were made to experience it and reflect it.

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And (2) that we stop our smoke and mirror schemes that we've designed to get the fake and fleeting smiles of the world.

Conclusion:

When the world smiles, its smile eventually gets covered in smoke and obscured until all we're left with is the fear that we can never be enough.

The God of Glory thunders and smoke covers God's face. Then, in Jesus, the storm stops and the smoke clears.

And what we see is the smiling face of our loving Heavenly Father in the smiling face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With his grace and glory beaming upon, we don't need the smiles of the world. We don't need the smoke and mirrors. Or the false gods who manufacture false and fleeting glory.

"You shall have no other gods in my presence." Once you've beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, you know how ridiculous it is to bring along any other gods with you. How self-destructive it is to serve them. How insulting it is to trot them out and bow before them in your Father's presence.

How are we going to fulfill this commandment? By keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ, who fulfills it for us, and in whose face we see not just the thunder and smoke of God's glory, but the smile of his pleasure and the hope of our own chance at real glory. Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ!