

Title: The Grace of Law – pt.2
Text: Exodus 21.12 – 23.19
Theme: God’s heart revealed through God’s law
Series: Exodus #40
Prop Stmt In order to live as God’s people, God’s people are to treat people the way God treats people.

Read Text: 21.12-17; 22.1-4; 21-29; 23.1-9

We have often heard people say, that religion is an intensely personal matter. What you believe is between you and God. There is a little bit of truth to that. For example: No one can understand the gospel and believe in your place. You will stand before God one day and give an account of your life and you will not be able to use others as an excuse. When you pray to God, no one else can listen in, unless of course, you are praying out loud. So, there is a sense that your relationship with God has a private and personal aspect to it. But, that is not it; not by a long shot. In fact, what you believe about God and your walk with him will be revealed in your relationship with others and how you interact with your world. Your understanding of the gospel will be put on display in how humble, merciful and gracious you are with others. That is why Christ spoke with such urgency of your need to be a compassionate and forgiving person. If you are unwilling to forgive others, then it becomes evident that you do not understand what it means to be forgiven by God. Forgiving others is not the cause that enables you to be forgiven by God – oh no! Being forgiven by God, is the cause that will drive you to forgive others. So, if you have drawn a line in the sand and refuse to forgive someone, and have found all sorts of reasons to affirm your self-righteousness, then you cannot legitimately claim to be a follower of Christ.

One of the major marks of being part of God’s people, is treating people the way God treats people. That is the theme that comes out of this section in Exodus 21-23 known as the Book of the Covenant. God has called Israel to be his people. God has rescued them, redeemed them, and set them apart so that he can live with them, and so they can live in the world in such a way that the world can know God.

Now, I want you to think about how important this is. The nation of Israel was being established in the middle of city-states, nations and a couple of empires that all had their own gods. What did those groups do to make their gods appear powerful and glorious? They built large temples. The greater the temple, the greater the god. If a neighboring country had a larger temple, then they must have a greater god. Later in this book, God gives instructions for his dwelling place and it is a portable tent, that is called the tabernacle. Now, the tabernacle is a very, very important aspect of life for Israel, but when you compare the tabernacle to the temples of the other gods, it is not very impressive. Please keep this in mind. God’s glory is made evident more in the lives of his people than in the size of a building. These laws that are given to the people of God are given so that God’s people will live in such a way that the world can see what a great and gracious God, he really is. It is true that God is God and that he has the right to make laws and call us to obedience. But, these laws do so much more than that. These laws

are not oppressive in nature. These laws are gracious. The way you treat others will reveal whether or not you really have a heart for God.

This morning, I am going to take us through the rest of the book of the Covenant and show you the heart of God as revealed in these laws. God is demanding that his people treat each other the way he would treat them. There are two themes that I want you to see that are repeated in these laws. They are justice and compassion. I will not cover every law, since many of them are self-evident. But, as we look at each section we need to ask: what do we learn about the nature of God and how are the people of God supposed to treat each other? What we will see is that God is just and compassionate and so, these laws call for God's people to be just and to be compassionate. For example, look at the first section.

1. **Laws about personal injury** (21.12-27)

What do we learn about the nature of God? We learn that life is sacred to God. God made life. When you kill someone, you are attacking him. The taking of a life is such a serious offense, that the penalty for this is just as serious. The laws covered in this section involve the death penalty. If you killed someone, you forfeit your own life. If you attack your parents, if you kidnap someone, or even if you curse your parents, you forfeit your own life. So, what do we learn about God? Life is valuable! If you kill someone else, you must die. And yet because God is just, he makes a distinction is made between intentional and unintentional (or accidental) killing. We also learn that how you treat your parents is a serious issue to God. If you attacked your parents, you were to be killed. If you cursed them, that is if you treated them with such contempt that you disowned them and refused to take care of them in their old age, you deserved death. The children in view here are not little kids throwing a temper tantrum, but adult children who are now in a position of power over their parents. Of course, this law may initially seem like it is aimed at the children is in reality aimed at the parents. If you want your children to live, teach them to respect you. Teach them to honor those who are in authority and take care of people who are under their care.

I do not take v.20 to mean that you can beat your servants just as long as you don't kill them. Do not forget that there were plenty of situations where a person had to indenture themselves to another as payment for the crimes they have committed. If they refuse to do what they are told, they can expect to be punished. However, the punishment must fit the crime. The owner cannot abuse his position.

Most people are familiar with verse 24. These verses essentially summarize what God is saying throughout this section. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth – Which is more serious? Eye! So, if someone knocks out your tooth, you can't take out their eye. Neither if you knock out someone's eye, is justice served if you only give up a tooth. The point is, the punishment must fit the crime. It is not a matter of vengeance, it is a matter of justice. Justice is a matter of God's law. Vengeance is when you try to take God's place.

In recent years, much attention has been given to verse 22 because it speaks to a woman giving birth pre-maturely as a result of being injured. Abortion is deplorable. The calloused disregard for life brings enormous consequences to our society. What is it that we as a nation want so badly that we are willing to kill millions of children in order to get it? The situation here is the unintentional injury sustained by a pregnant woman who somehow is injured as the result of two men fighting. Even when you are fighting, you have to maintain some measure of self-control. If you kill the other person, you forfeit your life. If you kill a bystander, you forfeit your life. If you cause a woman who is pregnant to give birth prematurely and either the woman or the baby dies you forfeit your life. If God is so concerned about protecting the life of an unborn child from accidental death, then how much more is he offended by the deliberate murder of children?

So, here it is again. God demands justice for all, even those whom societies have tended to ignore. This is seen in laws that protect unmarried women, in laws that protect unborn children, in laws that protect servants, and in laws that protect the widows and the orphaned (22.22). That is the consistent theme throughout this Book of the Covenant.

Like the OT people of God, we are called right now to reveal the heart of God to our world. One of the ways in which we do that is by speaking up for those who have no voice and by pursuing justice. I believe that the time will come when speaking out for truth will be more costly than it is now. But, in order to be ready for that, we need to practice speaking out. This week I wrote a letter to Senator Carl Levin regarding our nation's sanctioning of abortion. I want you to read it, and if you agree with it, sign it before we send it to him. I also intend to publish this in the local paper and post this on our web site. God has placed us here to preach the gospel and to pursue the implications of the gospel. We seek to bring all people to the King and we seek to live all of life as a taste of the kingdom. In the kingdom of Christ, the weak and defenseless are not murdered on the altar of convenience. I recognize that speaking out against abortion does not replace the preaching the gospel of the kingdom. But, if we preach the gospel of the kingdom, then we need to live the gospel. The gospel is the message that Christ has come to rescue helpless sinners. We who have been rescued need to be people who help rescue others.

(Letter)

The next section deals with laws about personal responsibility.

2. **Laws about personal responsibility** (21.28-36)

What do we learn about the nature of God?

God is the owner of all things and since he has made humans to rule the earth under him, it is perfectly acceptable for people to own things. But, before you make it your life's goal to own as much as possible, you need to consider this. You are personally responsible for everything that you own. The more that God entrusts into your care, the greater your responsibility and accountability is.

You are responsible for your animals (cars). If your bull kills a person, then your bull is killed. If your bull is known to gore (people or other animals), then you are responsible for what your bull does. In that case, if your bull gores someone to death, then not only does the bull die, but so does the owner.

- God holds people responsible for their domain.
- People have more value than animals.

This really ought to go without saying, but we don't get it in our nation. We spend millions of dollars protecting certain species and millions of dollars on abortion. We make no sense. Michael Vick, former superstar quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, spent 18 months in prison on a dog-fighting conviction. Fair enough. But, Donte Stallworth, superstar receiver for the Cleveland Browns, drives with a .126 blood alcohol level, hits a man and kills him and receives probation, plus suspended from the NFL for one year.

How are the people of God supposed to treat each other?

Recognize that your actions affect the community of God's people. The way you cared for and took responsibility for your animals spoke of your concern for others. The people of God are not to live just for themselves, but are to be aware of how their lives affect those around them. Therefore, take responsibility for your actions (or lack thereof) and expect responsibility from others (teach it to your kids). Your life affects others, and God has you here in order to affect others in such a way that they can experience a taste of the heart of God. The next section deals with how you handle the property of others.

3. **Laws about personal property** (22.1-17)

The people of God were more than neighbors and members of the same village. These people lived in the same tribes, had the same ancestors, shared the same history. Stealing from someone you don't know is bad enough, but when someone you know steals from you, it is nearly devastating. That is what makes guys like Bernie Madoff so sickening. They can smile at you, take your money, make big promises and then rob you blind. People like this, have no conscience. It is gone. There is no remorse, no genuine sorrow over the personal betrayal that has been committed.

The laws are pretty straight forward. If you are caught stealing, the punishment must fit the crime. Stealing is not punished like murder. However, if a thief breaks into a house at night, the owner does not know if the thief is intending to murder or simply to steal, so if the thief is killed, no punishment is given to the owner. If, however, a thief breaks in during the day, then the owner is not permitted to kill the thief, because his intent is obvious. God is always concerned about justice. He has given us ownership of things and he expects us to protect what we own.

Verses 5 and 6 deal with property damage that results from carelessness or incompetence. In either case, if your negligence resulted in the problem, you are responsible. In fact, the entire idea of minding up and taking responsibility and doing what is right is what characterizes the scenarios in the rest of this. God recognizes that things are going to happen in the course of life. Accidents, mistakes, failures characterize our lives and affect our relationships. What do we do about it? Integrity does not mean that you never make a mistake. Integrity means that you own your problems, acknowledge them and do the right thing. If you agree to look after someone else's property and something happens, then you are responsible. If you borrow something of your neighbors and it breaks – fix it. God's people are to be people who do not run away from their problems, but face them and deal with them.

4. **Laws about social responsibility** (22.18-23.19)

This final section, is pretty large and it starts with a number of warnings about matters that if they are ignored will destroy the community of God's people. In this section God shows the deliberate connection between worship and life. Witchcraft could not be tolerated. Bestiality was a perversion that demanded the death penalty. Idolatry was warned against again, and in this series of dire warnings God admonishes them again to not take advantage of people who are vulnerable (widows and orphans) – v.22. Once again, the way you treat those who are vulnerable reveals your true love of God. The community of the people of God is to be a place where we really look out for each other. The concept of "it's not my business" does not apply in the covenant community. Nor, do we use the problems of others as opportunities to exploit. That is what the world does.

There is language in here about loaning money to someone who is in need. When you are in the position of doing the loaning, you have a position of power. Before you agree to loan that money, you really need to examine your heart. Loan money in order to help the person. Do not loan money as a means of using their problem in order to get gain.

All around us, there are businesses in strip malls that offer cash advances on your pay check. So, if you are going to get paid at the end of the month, but you have to have money today for an emergency, these businesses will loan you the money. However, they will charge you interest. We did some investigation and found that the lowest interest rate that was being charged was an APR of 228.13%. The highest was 600% with most of them between 330 and 480%. What this basically ensures is that if you have to borrow from them once, you will have to keep borrowing and will have an almost impossible task of climbing out of that hole.

Since God uses his resources and authority to help people, then God's people need to recognize that they have been given resources and any position of influence to do the same thing. The way you take care of those who are under your care reveals what you really think about God. The way you treat those over whom you appear to have power reveals what your heart really worships. People matter more than stuff. Even your enemies are more important than stuff. (v.4) What happens when you help someone that you have an issue with? That usually goes a long way in helping to mend that

relationship doesn't it? And by the way, the warning at the end of v.19 is probably referring to a Canaanite fertility ritual that Israel was forbidden to emulate.

But in conclusion, there are two things that I want to address. These laws reveal the heart of God and they reveal how God's people are expected to reflect him in all of life. The obvious problem is that we don't. So, what do you do about the gap? What are you supposed to do when you don't keep the law, when you see your neighbor struggling with their ox in a ditch and you are happy about it, and you pretend like you don't see their need? Good laws are gracious gifts from God, but good laws and fair judges do not mean that we won't break them. The truth is, we have all broken God's law and we cannot make up the gap. That is why the next major section of this book is so important. God commands Israel to build a tabernacle. This tabernacle became the place of sacrifice because the children of Israel violated their own law, so much that God demanded a payment for it. This entire picture is for your benefit. While we are not in the nation of Israel, and the Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant, the pattern is still in place. We cannot keep God's law. We desperately need a Savior. All of this points to Christ. There is only one who can stand in your gap.

If you are trusting in anything or anyone else as the means to pardon your sins, I urge you to repent of that and bank your entire soul upon Christ and Christ alone. Only Christ because of his sinless life in which he perfectly kept the law of God could live in your place. Therefore only Christ could die in your place because only Christ could offer his own life as the full and final payment for your sin. He died in your place – Trust Him.