

Exodus 21:33–23:19

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Grayton. Just a brief prayer. Lord, we echo with the psalmist, how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Through your precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Lord, would you illuminate your word to us this morning? We desire our minds to be renewed, our affections increased for Christ, and our hands empowered to serve your world.

Amen. This morning we continue our summer journey through the book of Exodus. We resume where our text left off last week in the middle of what is commonly called the book of the covenant, that title taken from chapter 24, verse 7.

And as we make our way through a pretty substantial portion of the text, I want to say from the outset, what will unfold this morning will be more of a charcoal sketch than a fully colored detailed portrait.

[1 : 08] Due to the sheer volume and length of this passage and the time that we have, we won't be able to answer every question or provide comments on every verse. But what I hope will result from our time together is us leaving with some helpful thoughts that can guide our personal or group reflection this upcoming week.

It was in 1787 where delegates representing nearly every state came together in what is known today as Independence Hall to draft our nation's constitution.

A new nation had recently emerged following independence that had just been won. There they derived a government well known for its checks and balances.

And there they implemented our Bill of Rights with additional amendments. It would have been quite a sight to behold to take part in that, to sit in those discussions, in the establishment of laws that govern a nation.

And here we are this morning and we're given quite a view, a behind-the-scenes view of laws that were given to establish a nation.

[2 : 26] You only have to, since your Bibles are open, you only have to look at the opening line of chapter 21. Now these are the rules that you are to set before them, namely Israel.

If you simply took a moment to flip through the latter chapters or scroll through on your devices, you'll see that the ESV has given helpful headers. There's laws about altars beginning in chapter 20, laws about slaves in 21, laws about restitution, laws about social justice, laws about Sabbath and festivals.

And immediately you begin to see we are inserting our finger or giving a view of when the law was being revealed to govern a nation, a people.

In one way or another, a couple things we need to note. In one way or another, we are invited into this room where the Constitution is being drafted. It is being drafted following divine deliverance.

The people's freedom had just been bought and won by God himself. However, this drafting of this Constitution or this book of the Covenant is radically different than any other nation's law in this way.

[3 : 42] It was not a committee of leaders assembling together, discussing what would work for a government. It was not an elected committee. It was not rules set up and then voted on by people.

Instead, it wasn't a collective group. Rather, these rules were unique from every modern society in this way and even unique in the ancient Near East during Israel's time.

These rules, according to chapter 20, verse 22, were divinely given. They were divinely given. It's important to keep in mind that Israel's law is given post-redemption.

The law is not first given and then requiring obedience to belong to the people of God. Rather, they became the people of God and then they were given the law. The law is not something that was Israel that was to earn God's pleasure.

Rather, God's pleasure already rested on God's people. This is immensely important to grasp. Israel had been set apart because of divine intervention. No other nation, Deuteronomy tells us, was founded upon divine deliverance.

[4 : 52] They were uniquely loved. They were God's firstborn child. They were his treasured possession. They were handpicked, elected, out of all the peoples of the earth. Therefore, Israel being God's special possession, holding a unique position in the world, when given the law, this law would reflect Israel's uniqueness.

Israel was redeemed out of God's love and it would be this love that would govern them as a people. It's important to note that when God rescues a people, he doesn't simply rescue them and let them be.

God rescues a people and commits to their preservation. His means of preservation in the book of Exodus would be his law. His law is a means of grace to uphold his people.

To further establish this frame of reference, there's a couple things I need to lay out. So before I start sketching, let me just set the frame. In this text, we need to see the law pertains to generally speaking two spheres.

Firstly, it concerns matters of worship and secondly, matters of social responsibility. The law was to uphold two things. Worship of God alone and the preservation of Israel's society.

[6 : 15] You begin to see this in the Ten Commandments given earlier, that the first four commandments were directed to God. How you are to worship. How you are to worship God alone.

You are not to craft another image. Worship was directed to God and God alone. Secondly, you see it in the latter commandments in the Ten Commandments that they were all prescribed to govern society.

The social ethic of the day. We see that as these laws unfold. Last week, it began with laws concerning altars. Namely, worship.

How are you to approach me or approach God when you worship? Followed by laws pertaining to slaves. How are you to treat people? What is your social responsibility?

And you'll begin to see this play out in our text this morning. It's affirmed by Jesus in the New Testament. You probably would know the story. It's very familiar.

[7 : 12] The religious leaders are fed up. Jesus continues to thwart them and their trickery and their craftiness. And after he had just silenced the Pharisees, a lawyer speaks up and says, Jesus, what is the greatest commandment?

To which Jesus replies, you should love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. Encapsulating love for God.

Love and worship of God. And the second one is just like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Of these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

And Jesus affirms this, that the law is to govern two spheres, our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. And here the law is given for two purposes.

To ensure the exclusive worship of God who delivered Israel and to preserve the social fabric of God's people in order that they could be a reflection of God's rule and ultimately God himself.

[8 : 17] Therefore, Israel's law focuses on two aspects, loving God and loving neighbor. With that frame set, let's pick up our charcoal.

First, I'd like us to see matters pertaining to property. property. The law has a lot to say about property. Drayton read a portion of it and in your time this week, I encourage you to read more. But the section handles items that had monetary value which could be restored or replaced. 21-33 through 22:17, I would say, is a set of casuistic laws, case law, identifiable by their causality or conditionality.

So the text helps us identify in this way. You'll see these phrases, when this happens, do this. If this happens, you're supposed to do this. They're on a case-by-case basis and these laws apply only in particular cases.

These laws are in contrast to a different type of law that we find in our Old Testament known as apodictic law, divine commands that are universal in nature, namely the Ten Commandments.

[9 : 30] Regardless of whatever case is happening, these ten things you are to uphold versus these different types of laws. And so from 21-33 through 22:17, the word is repeated numerous times, sharing the same root as the Hebrew Shalom.

The word in our context is translated in different ways. You see it translated as restoration in 21-34. If you continue, you see it translated as repay in 21-36.

It occurs as restitution for the majority of the section. It is the restoration of money or the paying back of money that was potentially lost due to accidental or deliberate loss.

So for example, in the first incident, after digging a hole, a man digs a pit and doesn't cover it. Your question is, why is a man digging a pit? Right?

Well, that's the question I asked. Why is he digging a hole? Well, it could be to trap an animal. It could be to dig a well.

[10 : 35] I mean, there's a couple different reasons why. But when a man digs a pit, he is obligated to cover it. If, however, he chooses not to market or not to cover it and a grazing animal happens to fall into it and die, the person who digs the hole is obligated to buy the deceased animal and in doing so, restore what is lost.

He is to pay back what is lost. Again, you see in 22:5 a different case. A man causes, so let's say you let your wild oxen, your oxen run wild and you didn't set up a perimeter and he begins to graze in your neighbor's field.

The law mandates that the owner of the oxen should make restitution from the best of his own field and own vineyard. See, in our English reading of this text, you and I see this financial repayment. Being a financially motivated culture, you can envision an exchange of money or a system of buyback in order to bring about restoration. However, the Hebrew word shalom is much more rich than simply financial restoration.

You may have heard it used in the context of peace. We are seeking shalom. Yet it embodies more than just simply peace. It carries the idea of making complete, bringing about fulfillment or wholeness.

[12 : 08] It is the act of fulfilling what is lacking. In so doing, you enable the flourishing of your neighbor or another by making things right. See, the act of restitution is far more than a financial transaction.

It's relational. It's relational. It is the act of loving a neighbor. In other words, if you fail to restore what was lost, you are actually tearing apart the fabric of social life.

It is a rip in the community. The restoration of property is not only for the recovery of finances and resources, but it is the restoration of a relationship. So for example, if you happen to borrow a friend's car and we're involved in a pretty significant accident, everyone's okay, but your friend's car is significantly damaged.

If you choose not to do anything, that relationship with your friend will never be the same. because at minimum, you should at least cover the deductible.

At minimum. And hopefully insurance gives them a rental and helps them with their inconvenience. But the reason I share that is because if you fail to restore financially, you are actually severing your friendship.

[13 : 38] You cannot sit down at dinner and say, hey, hey, hey, Joe, how's your day? Well, my day's terrible because I have no car. And so you begin to see that the laws are given not just for financial repayment.

The laws are given to preserve the social fabric of the community. If you break the law in this way, if you fail to restore property, you sin because it's the absence of shalom.

It is a failure to love your neighbor. That which brings wholeness, completeness, and peace is required. And if you deny that, you actually sin.

There is one caveat though. If you borrowed your friend's car, you had gotten in an accident, not your fault. your friend could do something pretty outrageous.

Your friend can say, it's okay. I waive the payment. I waive the restitution. If for whatever reason they choose not to receive what is owed to them, the offender is freed.

[14 : 53] Yet even in these instances, it incurs a cost. But the cost is incurred by the person who lent the car. they're choosing not to exact restitution.

Instead, they're extending forgiveness. Forgiveness for what is owed to them. Firstly, you see this. Matters pertaining to property.

Second, sketch. Matters pertaining to disadvantaged people. Last week, it was marvelously put on display. Unlike nations around her, Israel was not permitted to undervalue and exploit human life. It's further developed in this text. You see it. The text provides signposts pointed to those whom Israel is to give particular attention. Namely, 22 verse 21, the sojourner, the immigrant, the foreigner, the widow, the fatherless child, and in verse 25, the poor.

They were to do so by treating them with equity and dignity. They were to preserve truth. They were reiterating the ninth commandment. They were not to pervert justice, 23 verse 6.

[16:08] They were not to show partiality and favoritism, 23 verse 3. They were those who were to avoid bribes because bribes blind clear-sightedness and subvert righteous cause.

They are to give particular attention to these people groups. And there are two motivations to why Israel was supposed to do this.

It was not common in the ancient Near East and it's uncommon even today. There are two motivations. The first motivation is actually repeated twice. Consider your redemption.

Occurs in 22 verse 21 and again in 23 verse 9. The phrase is you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. The reason you are to go out of your way to extend compassion and mercy to the vulnerable is because God had compassion and mercy on you.

Israel, recall your oppression. Israel, recount your affliction, the heavy burdens on your back.

Recount the bitter life, the rootless heavy hand over you. Recount your enslavement, recount the death of your sons and your loved ones.

[17:16] Recount the mercy then that which flowed from heaven. towards you. The Bible says it so clearly when God says, I have seen the affliction of my people and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.

I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them. them. You are to have mercy because you know what they have been through.

According to 23 verse 9, you know their heart. Each member of the covenant community is to have compassion for disadvantaged people because all of them together know the experience of this plight.

Shared experience is powerful. It builds solidarity. students rally around the study experience. Sometimes the suffering experience.

Young mothers rally around raising young children and disciplining them together. Teachers congregate around unique roles and responsibilities. Teammates unify under shared athletic goals.

[18:27] These are shared experiences. experiences. But now consider this. Shared sufferings. Shared sufferings do something that shared experiences do not.

It is this bond that the law is calling Israel to embrace. You suffered. Therefore, it is your obligation to relieve all those who are suffering in the same manner you experience.

It's what Paul cites. He doesn't cite, but I believe he's thinking of it. A second letter to the church at Corinth. Since God has comforted us in our affliction, we are able to comfort those in their affliction with the comfort that God provides.

Israel, in this way you are to be a redemptive community. They are to be a community whereby the suffering and the afflicted find refuge and in turn find redemption. There's a second motivation besides recounting their experience as sojourners and migrants.

The second motivation is marked out by the first person pronoun I. The text is explicit, twice declaring it, that God hears the cry of the oppressed. Again, in 21, 23, and 27.

[19:38] Again, in 23, 7, God will not acquit the wicked. There are things that people do, Israel namely will do, that will demand God's action.

He will act. Mistreatment, oppression, exploitation of the defenseless incites, according to 22, 24, God's wrath and anger.

It is so horrendous that God would strike down his very own people that he just redeemed. It's actually baffling.

He just saved them and said, in light of your salvation, if you choose to do this, I will act against you. The people of Israel had witnessed this very deliverance.

The heavy hand of Pharaoh rested upon them. Pharaoh refused to let God's people go, and God heard their cry, and he delivered them, and he acted in such a manner that their wives became widows, and their children fatherless.

[20 : 47] The Bible reads, the Egyptian oppressors cried for the sword of the Lord took their firstborn, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. God is saying, because it is directly an abomination of my character, I will act, and I will preserve my own reputation.

In other words, if you dare treat the poor sojourner, widow, and fatherless in this way, it is such, so contrary to me that I, you are inviting and initiating, my divine judgment.

Since the law is divinely given, you and I begin to fashion some sense of the character of the law giver. His motives are revealed, he is compassionate, merciful, truthful, justice, is therefore core to God himself.

The wicked will not be acquitted. If this is the character of the law giver, the law, when obeyed by the community, will begin to reflect these characteristics.

Israel was to be distinct in that no other nation was founded in the manner which they were. Yet they were further distinct because no nation would behave in the manner which they behaved.

[22 : 01] They were set apart as a kingdom of priests. And something distinguishing them from every other nation is oftentimes law is the final arbiter. However, in Israel's case, law is not the final authority.

for being God's people, they would be accountable to God himself. This is a worthwhile distinction to note. Because you may sin against, as a person, you may sin against your neighbor and only perceive that you've wronged your neighbor.

You may sin against the state and only perceive you've wronged the state. You may sin against a loved one and only believe you've wronged a loved one. But for Israel, they understood when they mistreated a neighbor, they offended God himself.

It's radically different. It makes us reconsider when we obey the law. We obey the state, but in order to honor God. Here we find what will plague the Israelites and the rest of the Old Testament.

In violating God's law, you violate God himself. His law and his character are really inseparable.

And Israel will find their stumbling block is their inability to uphold and Torah or law will bring about God's judgment.

[23 : 18] So the question arises, amongst neighbors, I can bring restitution to restore that relationship. But what happens when I offend the law giver?

Are there mechanisms in place for restitution? What is the price that needs to be paid in those incidences? The divine intention for Israel was to be the light to nations?

If you were poor and you heard how Israel treated the poor, wouldn't you want to go there? If you were widowed and you heard how Israel embraced the widow, wouldn't you want to go there?

If you were disadvantaged and you heard how Israel welcomed and cared for the disadvantaged, would you not want to take part in it? this is how Israel was to be a light to the nations.

This is what happened for Ruth, is it not? Widowed. Poor. Her mother-in-law Naomi said, hey, Ruth, I got nothing to offer you.

[24 : 30] Go back to your homeland. Don't come back with me to Israel. And Ruth, probably unbeknownst to her, maybe known to her, said, no. Where you go, I'll go. Where you make your home, I'm going to make your home, your God will be my God.

So Ruth, widowed, poor, disadvantaged, enters into Israel's society. And what does she find? Wow. She finds this man, Boaz, who loves the law of the Lord and knows that it is his obligation because he was a sojourner or he is a descendant of a sojourner.

He must care for the widow and the poor. And so Boaz took to heart this passage. We're looking at a man who considered the plight of a foreigner, a man who understood the struggles of a widow, a man who saw the vulnerability of Ruth and then he acted to redeem her.

And in so doing, he modeled to you and I and all those who watched the very character of God. Is this not what you and I are called to? Is this not where the foreigner, stranger, poor, widow, fatherless child should find refuge?

[25 : 47] We are the people of God. And if it doesn't happen in this place, where does it happen? God's character must be reflected in God's community. Lastly, last sketch, matters pertaining to worship.

The book of the covenant begins with worship. We saw that in the altars read last week. A theme persists throughout. Worship is about loving God and living out particularly the first four commandments.

And you'll find these scattered throughout this text. It even seems like sometimes the writer just interjects and inserts this verse to say, hey, don't forget to worship God.

So with that said, the laws are given for the people's preservation of exclusive worship to God alone. That's why sacrificing to idols, other gods, in 22 verse 20, is a capital offense.

This is why in 23 verse 13, they are not even to utter the names of other gods. This is why priority is always given to God.

[26 : 54] You cannot revile God. This is all your everything really belongs to God. Israel is consecrated to God.

22 verse 31. They are set apart unto him. Therefore, worship, matters of worship, pertain to all areas of personal and social life.

In the same way these sets of laws began with matters of worship, it's going to close with matters of worship, 23 and following. They serve as bookends to this book of the covenant.

In the same way slaves were to serve for six years and then be released, the land was to work for six years and then be released on the seventh. The land should not be put to work in that seventh year, though it would continue to produce and yield, and the yield explicitly would go to the poor in that seventh year.

Similarly, for six days, 23, 12 says, you shall work, and on the seventh day you shall pause in order that you can rest, that your livestock may rest, that your servants may rest, that the sojourner may be refreshed.

[28 : 09] See, the Sabbath rhythm has two purposes. One, it's restorative. You see it in 23, 12. But you saw it earlier, that it was an act of divine imitation.

In so doing, in imitating God, they kept the day holy. I don't know if other civilizations did this. But in some sense, when Israel did this, it was a model to others of how God was.

In the law, God had implemented a system whereby they would be reminded constantly that they were treasured people. They were monotheists, devoted to God alone. They were not to make mention of other gods.

They were to hold three annual feasts, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest, the Feast of Ingathering. These three feasts would serve as annual markers of worship for Israel.

By this system of Sabbaths and annual festivals, God established for his people regular covenant reminders of their relationship to him. The weekly Sabbath routine would provide a reminder, renewal, every seventh day.

[29 : 20] The annual routine would provide three reminder renewals coinciding with probably the agriculture calendar of that time, bringing rest and focus on worship.

And in light of these three charcoal sketches, matters pertaining to property, matters pertaining to disadvantaged people, and matters pertaining to worship, as we conclude, I want to shade in a few things.

So I have the charcoal sketch, but I want to shade in a few things, because I think they will be helpful as we go. Firstly, from this text we can derive the domain of God's rule spans all of life.

The dominion over which God has authority in one's life is total. He is highly concerned with society, the social fabric of society, putting in civic and case laws to bring order to his people.

He is concerned with governance in respect of the office of ruler, so that you aren't even supposed to curse them, whoever holds that office. He claims ownership of personal possessions and property.

[30 : 30] When you get your harvest, bring it to me. When that oxen gives birth, bring it to me.

When you have a child, bring it to me. It is, he lays claim over family, over property, over wealth, even over time.

Given you have 24 hours a day, seven days a week, one day is mine, when in actuality, all of it is his. There is no sphere or realm in one's life in which God does not lay complete claim.

God merits, I'm quoting Alec Matea, commentary on Exodus, God merits entrance into all of life. All of life is his arena and for all of life, he has prescriptions and ideals.

On the other side of the picture, the Lord's people have a duty to bring all life under the scrutiny of his word and to live all life as his word directs.

So on one hand, God owns it all. On the other hand, you and I have this obligation to bring everything that we have, our time, our resources, our money, our family, all of it under scrutiny of his word and his direction.

[31 : 45] First shade, second and last shade, Israel was to be distinct from all the nations. Now the laws that they were to obey were not necessarily unique or distinct.

Other nations of the day had similar ones, common laws, restitution over property, preservation of human life, restraint against theft. There has been a lot of scholarship demonstrating this. You could talk to our own Robert Marino and I'm sure he can give you plenty of things. Yet, Israel was to be distinct through their obedience. They were to be a people who willingly obeyed. This obedience would reflect God's perfect law to the surrounding nations and be a means to glorify God. It would be a testimony to onlookers, thereby serving them, serving as a means to drawing them to Israel's God.

In high school, I was one of the few individuals, probably the only individual I knew, who did not have a curfew. Whether weeknight or weekday, it didn't matter. I was not obligated to come home at a certain time.

[32 : 51] Now that I've become a father, I don't know what my parents were thinking. But I took great joy in telling people, oh, I don't need to be home.

It doesn't matter what time it is. I don't need to be home. And it soon began, my dad noticed, it began to affect the rest of life, namely Sunday worship, because I would be half asleep across the pew in the back.

And so my dad instituted a law that I never had. On Saturday nights, you are back at 10 p.m. Well, it was a law. He paid the mortgage. He bought my food. And so I had to obey.

Then came that first Saturday evening. I'm with my buddies. It's 9:45. And the conversation comes up.

[33 : 57] Hey, guys, I've got to go home. Bing. When have you had to go home? No, no, no. I've got to go home. I've got to be home by 10.

Probably unbeknownst to my dad, unbeknownst to me, that became the pattern that I set because my dad had a conversation. He said, Bing, if you want to engage in worship Sunday morning, you better start thinking about it Saturday night.

And so the law came into effect so that I could love the Lord better. But what resulted from it, I could have never predicted. Because as the subsequent weeks followed and I was out Saturday night, my friends would be like, oh, okay, well, Bing has to go home at 10.

Again? Yeah, yeah, I've got to go home at 10. Again? Yeah. And then came the conversation, why do you have to be back at 10? Well, I need to be back at 10 because at 9:30, I need to be in church. My friends are like, what? Why do you need to who cares? And then the conversation that ensued is, oh, well, I care.

[35 : 10] as a result of the law implemented by my dad, what I sensed as a restriction of freedom became a means and an avenue to honor God, to share my faith, to live distinctly, so that all my unbelieving friends said, Bing can't watch that movie, we have to go to an earlier show because he has to be back at 10.

It's crazy. My friends began to align themselves with my, the law that I had put myself under so that they could hang out with me.

And I have a sense that that's what for, I mean, yeah, yeah, yeah, no. But I have, I have this sense that this is what 1 Peter is writing. Live in, conduct yourselves in such a way that though Gentiles scorn you or laugh at you, when the day returns, when the Lord returns, they will actually glorify God.

Because of distinct living, because of distinct living. At the time, I wasn't aware that the implementation of a curfew would bring that result.

My dad couldn't have predicted it. However, it conveyed a message a message that permeated my unbelieving community. I close with this, that as a community of believers, if you love Christ and love your neighbor, crave and strive after holiness, something profound will happen.

[36 : 57] And Deuteronomy gives us a commentary, which I'll close. Chapter 4. Moses has just been told, you're not coming into the promised land. And then he turns around and looks at the people of Israel.

And it reads this, I have taught you, Moses saying to the people of Israel, statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all the people surrounding nations, who when they hear all these statutes or laws will say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as to this law I set before you today?

The law was a demonstration of the righteous rule of God. As Israel obeyed, as the people of God obeyed, the nations around them in the Old and New Testament will commend them.

[38 : 18] If Israel obeyed, the nations of the earth would be astounded because no God was so near as the Lord would be to Israel. The law therefore was a means whereby outsiders while watching Israel would be led to worship Israel's God.

Let's pray. Father, we desire to delight in your law. And on it we want to meditate day and night so that we would be prosperous and successful.

And these things are really a reflection of who you are. Your character to preserve your people.

And Lord, I pray as a congregation that we would be distinct from all other peoples around us. That we would love God most and love one another as well.

And in so doing, I pray that when visitors, strangers, onlookers, widows, orphans, the poor, the migrant, the wealthy, the educated, whoever comes through these doors and they encounter your people, they would have a sense of your character.

[39 : 49] And knowing that sense, they would desire to know you. And so Lord, as we sing, would we be reminded of our deliverance and be reminded of the status that we've been given.

We're a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people for your own possession so that we may declare the excellencies of him who called us.

Help us God. Go before us. May we honor you. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. God