

AM Deuteronomy 24:5-22

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[0 : 00] Pleased to be with you once again. Let's join together in worshipping God through Psalm number 111. In the Sing Psalms section of this book, and that's on page 150 if you're following in the book.

Psalm 111, and we'll sing the whole psalm, I think. Praise to the Lord, I will extol him while gathering with the upright. Great are the works of God, and pondered by all who in them take delight.

Now since we can't sing out loud, we can sing in our hearts, and I hope that we'll be able to express our gratitude to God through these words, and at the same time hear him speaking to us about his kindness and love and steadfastness.

Psalm 111. Praise to the Lord, I will extol him, for gathering with the upright.

Great are the works of God and pondered, by all who in them take delight.

[1 : 17] His deeds are glorious and majestic. His righteousness endures always.

Because his works to be remembered, Kind is the Lord and full of grace.

Food he provides for those who fear him, His covenant forever stands.

His mighty works he shows his people, By giving them the nations' hands.

Faithful and just are all his actions. All his commands are faithful too.

[2 : 27] Set fast forever and forever. The works of God are right and true.

He sent redemption for his people, His covenant remains the same.

Heart and in hiding throughout all ages. Holy and awesome is his name.

Fear of the Lord gives rise to wisdom. All those who walk in a bright grace.

Come inside and good understanding. To him belongs eternal grace.

[3 : 35] We'll join together in prayer and ask God's blessing on our service. Lord, We thank you Lord for these inspired words, That encourage us in a spirit of worship, To praise your name, And that give us plenty motive for doing so, Because they recount your wonderful deeds, And your grace and mercy towards your people.

And we pray that we may be responsive to such things as these, And come before you now, And come before you now, In a humble spirit of gratitude, And dependence on you.

We thank you that you have ordained redemption for your people, A covenant that lasts forever, Because you are a faithful God, Steadfast, Trustworthy to what you, In regard to what you have said.

And we thank you for our experience of your grace, In practice, That you convicted us of sin, You led us to some sense of need, You brought us low, And in doing so, You brought us also to a knowledge of the Lord.

And we thank you that once we were blind, But now we can see, For you give insight and understanding to those that fear you. And we thank you that once we were guilty, But now we can come to you accepted, That once we were without God and without hope in the world, But now we can look forward to wonderful things, As we experience also your grace and mercy from day to day.

[5 : 20] And we pray, Lord, That we may reflect on our experience of these things, And have a genuine spirit of gratitude to you, Of worship towards you, And of dependence on you throughout our worship.

We ask then that you would make your presence felt to us all, And that you would guide us in all that we do, So that we may use your word in a fitting way. And although there may be some restrictions on us, That we may have a sense of fellowship with one another.

We ask that you would speak to us, And enlighten our minds, And lead us in your ways, And help us to honour you, therefore, In all that we do.

So we commit ourselves to you now for our time together, In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. Now our first reading is from the Old Testament, And from the book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 24.

We're going to read from verse 14, And continue reading into chapter 25, Just a few verses. Deuteronomy chapter 24, And at verse 14.

[6 : 34] And these are miscellaneous laws, As you will see. You shall not oppress a higher servant, Who is poor and needy.

Whether he is one of your brothers, Or one of the sojourners, Who are in your land, Within your towns. You shall give him his wages on the same day, Before the sun sets.

For he is poor and counts on it. Lest he cry against you to the Lord, And you be guilty of sin.

Fathers shall not be put to death, Because of their children.

Nor shall children be put to death, Because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death, For his own sin. You shall not pervert the justice, Due to the sojourner, Or to the fatherless.

Or take a widow's garment in pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, And the Lord your God redeemed you from there. Therefore I command you to do this.

[7 : 39] When you reap your harvest in your field, And forget a sheaf in the field, You shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, The fatherless, And the widow.

That the Lord your God may bless you, In all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, You shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, The fatherless, And the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, You shall not strip it afterwards. It shall be for the sojourner, The fatherless, And the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt.

Therefore I command you to do this. If there is a dispute between men, And they come into court, And the judges decide between them, Acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty, Then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, The judge shall cause him to lie down, And be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes, In proportion to his offence.

Forty stripes may be given him, Not more. Lest if one should go on to beat him, With more stripes than these, Your brother be degraded in your sight.

[8 : 56] You shall not muzzle an ox, When it is treading out the grain. We'll just read to there. May God bless to us this reading. Now our next psalm is Psalm 112, And we're going to sing verses 1-8, And that's on page 151.

And it's much the same sort of psalm, As the previous one that we sang. It invites us to praise God, And it tells of the blessings that come, To those that look to him.

Praise God. Blessed is a man who fears the Lord, And finds delight in following his word. His children will be mighty in the land, His line will know the blessing of God's hand.

Psalm 112 verses 1-8. Praise God. Praise God. Praise God. The man is blessed who fears the Lord, And finds delight in following his word.

His children will be mighty in the land, His line will know the blessing of God's hand.

[10 : 12] Riches and wealth within his house are found, His righteousness forever will abound.

The man who stands for mercy, truth and right, Will find the darkness turned to morning light.

Good is the man who gives and freely rest, To his affairs with justice he attends.

Surely a righteous man will stand secure, His memory forever will endure.

Although bad news may come, He's not afraid. His heart is firm, He trusts the Lord for aid.

[11 : 25] He will not be dismayed, His battles past, He will new place, Those in triumph at the last.

Now we're reading the New Testament Scriptures from 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And we'll read some verses from verse 1. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 to 15.

We want you to know, brothers, About the grace of God that has been given Among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, Their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty Have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For they gave according to their means, As I can testify, And beyond their means of their own accord, Begging us earnestly for the favour Of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, But they gave themselves first to the Lord, And then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus, That as he had started, So he should complete among you

This act of grace.

[12 : 59] But as you excel in everything, In faith, in speech, in knowledge, In all earnestness, And in our love for you, See that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command, But to prove by the earnestness of others, That your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, That though he was rich, Yet for your sake he became poor, So that you by his poverty might become rich.

And in this matter, I give my judgment. This benefits you, Who a year ago started, Not only to do this work, But also to desire to do it.

So now, Finish doing it as well. So that your readiness in desiring it, May be matched by your completing it, Out of what you have.

For if the readiness is there, It is acceptable, According to what a person has, Not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased, And you burdened, But that as a matter of fairness, Your abundance at the present time, Should supply their need.

[14 : 20] So that their abundance may supply your need, That there may be fairness. As it is written, Whoever gathered much, Had nothing left over.

And whoever gathered little, Had no lack. May God bless to us also this reading. And I will again join together in prayer.

We thank you for the work of our Lord. That he came amongst us as one of us.

That he lived in relative poverty. A simple basic life in our nature. Though God himself. And we thank you that he did that as our representative.

And that what he did in his life, And death, And resurrection, He did on our behalf. And we thank you that he is now, Seated at your right hand, On our behalf.

[15 : 24] Interceding for us. Taking our petitions. And presenting them to you. We thank you again for our experience of his grace. And acknowledge that once we were poor.

But now, through his poverty, We have become rich. And we thank you, Lord, For the privileges that belong to us. We can number ourselves as the sons and daughters of God.

We have been told that we need but ask. And it will be given to us. We have the assurance of your presence. Of your grace. We are told that you will never leave us.

Never forsake us. That we can do all things through the one that strengthens us. We acknowledge that we do not use these riches as fully as we ought.

We do not lay claim to what is ours as much as we should. But we thank you for what we have enjoyed. Of the riches that are ours in Christ.

[16 : 27] And we pray that we may cherish what he has done for us. And the status to which he has given us access. And we ask that this might enrich our experience from day to day.

And enable us to honour you and serve you increasingly in daily life. We pray for those around us. Who do not have what we enjoy.

We pray that we may not look down on them. Because they do not have this. But that we may look with mercy on them. As you have looked with mercy on us. We pray for those that are poor.

In regard to spiritual things. And have not yet recognised their poverty. And we pray that they may come to a sense of need. That may lead them to seek somebody outside themselves.

And by your blessing may lead them to a knowledge of the Lord. We pray for everything that is done on their behalf. With a view to bringing the gospel to them in time of need.

[17 : 32] All your people who witness in this community. The preaching of the gospel. Through whatever congregation it is done. We ask that whatever is done truly in your name.

And may bring honour to you. In its making effect on the hearts of others. And we pray that there might be those that are brought to a real knowledge of the Lord.

We ask for the witness of this congregation in particular. That you would guide in everything that is done. And as things open up hopefully more and more. We pray that opportunities may be more fully grasped.

And that you would bring folks amongst us. And bringing folks to know you. We pray for the poor and needy. In regard to material things. There are people around us.

Who feel they don't have enough to eat. To eat or drink. There are people that are friendless. And there are folks that have no one to turn to in time of need.

[18 : 33] And we realise that these are indeed poor people. That require help and guidance and support. And we pray that we may not close our hearts to them.

We think of the poor and needy throughout our land. And indeed throughout the world. There are many suffering through illness in these days. And although we have much support in the way of medical attention.

And so on. There are many in other parts of the world. Who do not have this support. Who do not have adequate medical attention. And have no hopes of vaccination for example.

And we realise that they are in extreme difficulty compared to us. We ask that you would be at work. To hold back this plague. And to grant that there might be mercy shown to us.

As a suffering world. And we pray for wisdom. In those in authority. That they may not act irresponsibly. But sensitively.

[19 : 35] Remembering that it is not the economic needs of a country. That are paramount. But the overall well-being of their people. We pray for those who act unjustly in this situation.

Cornering resources that are meant for the poor and needy. And we pray that you would rebuke them. And grant that the resources that are available. May be justly distributed amongst those that need them.

We think of those that have other problems to face. There is violence in different parts of the world. And we pray for restraint in these situations. We think of the situation in the Middle East.

The Israelis and the Palestinians. We thank you for the measure of peace that has been established. It would seem there. And we pray that this might result in a longer peace.

In the resolution of the outstanding difficulties that folks go through there. We think of other areas of the Middle East where there is turmoil.

[20 : 43] North Africa as well. Myanmar. Other places too. That don't come to the headlines perhaps. But are very real to the people concerned.

And we ask that you would be at work to show yourself to be a great God. Who is merciful and controls the violence of the nations.

We pray for all evangelical agencies that are at work in situations of need. Medical work. Educational work. Agricultural work. Agricultural work. And simply the relief of poverty.

And we ask that you would give them wisdom in the use of the resources. So that these may be employed in a way that will encourage people to look after themselves.

And enable them to do so. And that goes to the root of the problems. And not just plasters over the difficulties. And we ask Lord for wisdom in this respect. And for sensitivity.

[21 : 41] And for faith as well. So that they may not be conducted simply like a business. But that they may be conducted looking to you for blessing. And we pray that the ultimate result might not be the alleviation of suffering and need.

But folks being brought to know the Saviour. And your name honoured as a great God who is mighty to save. We pray for the preaching of the gospel the world over today.

And ask that you would prosper it. If it is still not being done in church buildings. We pray that it may be done by other means. And where that is not possible through modern technology.

We ask that Christian people and others too. May be stirred up to read the word for themselves. And to reflect on it. And that they may know the influence of your spirit.

Taking that word and applying it to their hearts. So may they feel that they are being fed today.

Those especially who are not able to meet together. May they know your presence in a special way.

[22 : 45] Now Lord we ask you to accept these our prayers. Because we ask these things resting upon the merits of our Saviour. Amen. We are going to sing now in Psalm 107 verses 10 to 16.

Psalm 107 at verse 10. And that is on page 144. Now this is a psalm that is speaking of God's people. In their experience in exile.

And their return from exile. And it takes up different sections of the community. What this sort of. Which these people have experienced in their exile.

What these others have experienced and so on. So here is a section that speaks in this way. Some sat in darkness and in gloom. In chains of iron held. They scorned the ways of God most high.

Against his words rebelled. And so he made them labour hard. And bitterness and shame. They stumbled. And they could not rise. To help them no one came. And then it speaks of what God in fact did do for them.

[23 : 56] In their distress. So here is God's mercy. To those that were prisoners. Probably literally. And not just literally. But spiritually as well. Psalm 107 from verse 10.

Which eerily ■ has returned. A satin dark, a raon clean ploth is ricochial faces.

Thank a Lei. To those that were prisoners■. What do you cost them hard? At they blink well? The ways of God who's high against His words rebelled.

And so He made them with a heart, in bitterness and shame.

They stumbled and they could not rise, stood out that no one came.

[25 : 24] Then to the Lord they cried for help, He saved them from their doom.

He broke now with their cruel chase, and brought them out of him.

So let them thank Him for His love, the peace of the Lord.

Because He breaks the gates of cross, and Thine on Mars He pleases.

Now I want to look at Deuteronomy chapter 24, and verses 29, sorry, verses 19 to 22.

[26 : 58] Deuteronomy chapter 24, starting at verse 19. When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it.

It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. And then we'll go through to verse 22.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. Therefore I command you to do this. Now, why would I want to preach on a passage like this?

Which is, I think, rather unusual, and probably quite neglected. And there are three reasons why I want to take this. The first of all, the first one is simply this, because it's there.

It's part of the Bible. And if we believe that the Scriptures are given by inspiration of God, and are profitable, then there's no part of the Scriptures that we should overlook, or that we should thrust aside and say, well, it doesn't apply to me today.

[28 : 09] All Scripture is profitable. Therefore, even a passage like this, we must look at from time to time. The second reason is that this comes from a section of the Scriptures that many people find difficult.

And folks that read through the Bible, I suspect, are often tempted to skip chapters like this, that speak about things in Israel and don't seem to apply in our situation today.

What do we do with these laws and regulations that were very much designed for Israel's day and age? How should we interpret them?

Are they of any use to us at all? I want to take this passage as a sort of example of how I think we should deal with these passages. And I'm going to outline certain ways of approaching them, and try and show what the best way of looking at them is.

But the third reason why I want to deal with this is because it deals with the alien, the sojourner, as it's called here, the alien or the stranger, the foreigner, and the fatherless and the widow.

[29 : 20] It deals with the poor and the needy. Now, nowadays, it seems to me, we're confronted with this situation in our own setting, probably more than ever before.

Most towns nowadays have a food bank, which proves that the system of poor relief that is meant to be operative isn't working properly.

And there are folks that are left out, or feel themselves to be left out, and there are needy people around us. Every city, and many big towns, have significant sections of their community that are immigrants, or that are asylum seekers.

People that have come from abroad, and are living amongst us, although not yet Scottish, or even British. That's the situation.

And some of these are starving, because at a certain stage of the process, they're not allowed to work, even when they want to work. And some of them simply have nobody to care for them.

[30 : 30] So, poverty is a situation, a reality in our setting. The stranger, the sojourner, the foreigner, and the poorer section of society.

We need to give attention to them. And this passage deals with that sort of thing. So, is there any guidance in this passage that would help us in our dealings with the poor, and the needy around us today?

So, with these three things in mind, I want to tackle this passage. It's a passage about what we usually call gleaning, gleaning, although I hadn't noticed, actually, that that word is not used in this translation here.

But gleaning is something that, to call it that, may not help you very much. So, I just want to mention what it is, first of all. And you may say, well, who gleans today?

Well, I actually remember, as a boy, going out to the fields around Saltcoats, where I was brought up in Ayrshire, after what we call the tattie-hulking. I don't know if you know what the tattie-hulking

is, all of you, but it's the potato harvest.

[31 : 39] And there was a lady there that was going through the field, and she was picking up the potatoes that had not been gathered in, and putting them in her shopping bag, and no doubt going away to feed the family with them.

She was gleaning. She was taking up what remained after harvest that had been left in the fields, and she was using it to feed herself and their family. And that was the way that poor relief was conducted in these days, by allowing folks to glean the fields.

What is mentioned here is the grain harvest, so barley and wheat is in mind here. What is mentioned are the harvest of the grapes and of the olives, which were staple crops in those days, an essential part of their livelihood.

So pretty well the whole agricultural process is in mind here, and the poor and the needy got their poor relief by going to the fields and gathering up what had remained after harvest for themselves. And that was the way the poor and needy were dealt with. Okay, that's the setting now. Now, how are we going to interpret this? Can we apply this in our day and age at all?

[32 : 58] Well, some people have a very literal approach to this, and they apply it to the letter, they apply the letter of the law. And they would say, well, if that's the way they did it then, that's the way we've got to do it, because God's word says it.

Poor people must be allowed to glean in the fields and harvest what has been left over, and that's the way we've got to look after them today. Now, that's a literal interpretation of this, a literal application of this.

The letter of the law, taken as it stands, and applied in our setting today. And you may say, well, that's a bit ridiculous, who ever heard of that? But I would point out, you see, that gleaning does go on, not just in the way we might think, but reading a wee bit about this, I was surprised to discover what people consider this gleaning today.

And they mention, for example, the fact that many supermarkets, for example, the food that they would throw out because it had passed its sell-by date, some of them have an arrangement to give it to charitable organisations, to give it to the poor, and to redistribute it that way.

And that would be gleaning, according more or less, to the biblical pattern. And I discovered, again, reading things up, that this is actually something done, at least in England, I couldn't find examples in Scotland, it's at least done in England, where some charities have arrangements with farmers, who have produced too much of vegetables particularly, and the supermarkets don't want to buy them, and they would be rotting in the fields otherwise.

[34 : 41] So these charities are allowed to harvest the surplus crops and redistribute it to the poor. And if we're going to take this passage literally, then we would have to say, that's a good idea, and we'll probably say that anyway.

That's a very good idea, from the point of view of not wasting things, it's a good idea. But some would say, well, that's what the scriptures have in mind. So the surplus goods from the supermarkets and from the fields should be redistributed amongst the poor.

But of course, you can see that it isn't really the same thing. I mean, it just doesn't work as an adequate solution.

The urban poor, say, in Kolkata, is it nowadays, I was going to say, Kal, you know what I mean, in that place in India, Kolkata, it's called now. You know, how could all the urban poor survive like that?

Maybe the rural poor could, but it just wouldn't work today. Anyway, there'd be all sorts of fights over it if it was allowed to be done that way.

[35 : 47] You know, it just isn't applicable as a general rule. So although we may find something interesting and applicable in that way of looking at things, it doesn't do justice to what is in mind.

So, let's look at another way of looking at this. The second way that we can approach this is to say, well, what are the big principles behind this? What are the big ideas that are behind this?

And how are they applied in our situation today? So we don't say, oh, gleaning's the big thing we must glean today. We say, what are the principles that lay behind the gleaning?

Then that's the way we've to deal with the poor and needy amongst us today. You don't go to the letter of the law because the letter kills. You go to the spirit of the law, which is in keeping with New Testament teaching.

So, you go to the big ideas that lay behind this and you say, how do these apply in our situation today? And some people are very quick to produce the big ideas that lie behind this idea of gleaning.

[36 : 56] And, again, even if we don't think this passage teaches that, which I don't actually, they are, nonetheless, ideas that we could support on the grounds of other scriptural principles because they say, I think, something like this.

These poor people, they were not just given the dole. They had to work for what they got. In working for what they got, they didn't become dependent on others and cultivate an attitude of mind always of getting and never of giving because they had to work for what they got.

And there was some self-respect in the system. So, it's not a matter of giving out money on the dole. It's a matter of also allowing poor people to be independent, encouraging them to self-effort, encouraging them to maintain their self-respect and not just be lazy about supply for them.

That, they say, is the principles that lie behind this gleaning passage. And these are the principles that we apply in our own setting today. Now, if you take it that way, you can see how interesting that is because it means that any government initiative that simply throws money at the poor isn't living up to biblical standards.

It's making them dependent. It's taking away their self-respect. It's making them absolutely children in the hands of the authorities, absolutely dependent.

[38 : 39] And it isn't accordance with this biblical past pattern. It isn't simply money that people need. It's self-respect and independence as well.

And if I could bring in a historical note here, maybe some of you aren't at all interested in this. But anyway, I'll mention it. But there was a time, you may know, when poor relief depended on the efforts of the church, basically.

It was administered through the church. But there was a time, of course, when it became very difficult to do that. And the Industrial Revolution meant that people were flocking into the cities and the system of poor relief was being overwhelmed.

And outstanding leaders of the church like Thomas Chalmers, for example, who was a well-known figure in the Scottish church in the early part of the 19th century, he had a system of poor relief that he tried to extend widely and that many people did take as a pattern.

And it was very heavily dependent on this idea. You mustn't make people lazy. You mustn't make them dependent. You mustn't make them lose their self-respect.

[39 : 54] And that would be in accordance with this sort of principle. So, if we take it that way, we have all sorts of ammunition to criticize what goes on amongst us today.

Because the sad fact of the matter is that independence is taken from the poor frequently the way things are done amongst us and that there's no encouragement to get back to work.

The thing that makes my blood boil is this. That here's a person who takes up poorly paid employment and he's just got enough money so that he comes into the tax bracket and he pays his taxes and some of these taxes go to support the poor around him who are simply on benefit and they get more than he does.

It's absurd. It's wicked. It's a poverty trap. And this sort of way of looking at things would say no, that's not the way to do it. You must have a poor relief system that encourages people to go to work that gets them over their poverty and that gives them independence and self-respect.

So, if we take that way of looking at this there's a lot of ammunition by which we might criticize society today. And it would lead us to saying we support initiatives which help people to get over their poverty that equip them to get back to work that encourage them to get back to work.

[41 : 23] We're all behind every poor relief effort that has that sort of thing in mind and that's the sort of thing we can support if we look at this if we agree this is what the Bible is teaching us at this point.

And then if we look abroad and of course much of the poverty that we see does come to us comes to our attention from places out with our own immediate setting.

There is poverty amongst us as I've said. But of course every time we look at a TV screen pretty well to see the news we're confronted with another situation of poverty. People suffering from Covid and not being treated.

People suffering from warfare and not being looked after. Refugees in camps, refugees amongst us. Boat people trying to get to us. Trying to get from Africa to Italy and so on.

We're confronted with these stories of terrible suffering and misery and poverty. People driven to do extreme things through poverty. Well you know what do we say about that?

[42 : 25] How do we help things in that respect? And you see that this would say well you don't just give a hand out you give a hand up. You may have heard of the saying if you give a man a fish you just have to give him another one tomorrow.

But if you teach him to fish then he'll be able to look after himself. And we should be on the lookout for projects that do support that way of looking at things and that encourage the people to work for themselves and gain their independence rather than simply live on handouts.

and we can discern or we can discriminate between one aid giving agency and another. Yes there must be emergency help given to everybody but any project that helps people to get out of their poverty and to look after themselves is in accordance with these principles that some people think are here in this part of the scriptures and even if they're not our general principles that we could deduce from other parts of the scriptures.

So there's a second way of looking at things. You don't take this literally and say gleanings the thing to do today that's the sum and substance of all because the Bible said it. You've got to say what are the big principles that lie behind these instructions here and how do they apply in our setting.

But there's a third way of looking at this and it's not really different from the last that we've sketched out because what I'm saying is really the that yes we go to the big principles but make sure that you've got the right ones and it's saying that this is all about how you look after the poor.

[44 : 12] It isn't really like that at all. It's not directed to gleaners, it's directed to farmers and vineyard owners and owners of olive groves.

It's not directed to the people that are doing the gleaning. gleaning. It's directed to the people who are allowing them to do the gleaning. It's not a message for the poor, get on with it and don't be so lazy, look after yourselves.

It's not that at all. It's directed to the rich, not to the poor. And that's what we've got to look at.

What's the big principle here for the people to whom this was actually addressed at the time?

And it was addressed to the rich landowners and to the wealthy farmers and to those that had plenty because they had vineyards and olive groves and so on. Now what's the big principle about that?

It's not about how you look after the poor. It's about their hearts. It's about their attitude to things.

And that's the big idea that this really does teach us about.

[45 : 17] There's a description given here of all that they've got to do. When you reap your harvest and forget the sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it.

And then later on, when you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. Well, olives grew plentifully on the branches of olive trees and apparently you got them down by beating the branches.

So you took a long pole and you beat all the branches and the olives would fall to the ground and you would collect them from there. That was the way it was done. Now, they're told, you do that once and then leave it and the poor can have the rest.

And similarly, in regard to the vineyard, when you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterwards. In other words, you go over it once and if you missed a bunch, well, too bad, that's not yours any longer, it's for the poor.

You don't pick up the grapes that have fallen loose. You leave something over. And that's what he's telling them to do. He's telling them to be generous. That's what it's all about.

[46 : 26] Who was it that would beat his olive trees so thoroughly that there wasn't a single olive left? The niggardly person that couldn't bear seeing a single olive go into the hands of somebody that hadn't earned it.

That was the man that's being got at here. Who was the person who would go back and get the sheaf in the field and glean the last of the grapes? The man that was ungenerous.

He knew these things were for the poor and needy. And if he wanted to grab the last bit of it for himself then it was showing an ungenerous spirit.

And this is what this passage is all about. It's saying you who are rich and well off you have to be generous with what you've got. He's not saying to them you sell your lands and distribute it amongst the poor.

He's saying you gain from your lands but be generous in your attitude and not niggardly in your approach to relieving the poor and needy. And that's the big principle that is in mind here.

[47 : 30] It's directed to the rich and it says you've got to be generous and that's the message for today. But it's not the whole message for today. We can add two things to that and the big thing to me is that he's adding here the motive for all this.

It's not just a law laid down. You must be generous. Don't take your sheaves in when you've left one behind. Don't beat your olive trees more than once.

There's much more to it than that. The source of generosity is brought out here. The motivation for being generous is stressed here very much so that it isn't simple generosity that he's talking about. You see here in verse whatever it is. 18 it is now this is the previous part but it doesn't matter because it's repeated. You should remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there therefore I command you to do this.

This was the motivation. They had been slaves in Egypt and they had been redeemed from there. And then in verse 22 it repeats it. You should remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt therefore I command you to do this.

[48 : 50] Now you see it brings in an extra dimension. I'm not wanting you to say oh this is teaching us to be generous. Because the motivation is all important.

It was a generosity that came from remembering. A generosity that came from remembering their past experience. And one aspect of that past experience was that they were slaves in Egypt. Egypt. So they're meant to think we once were poor. Think about how we were treated. Did we like it or did we know? Think on the way that we are to slave away for others.

Did we like it or did we not? We were strangers there. Foreigners were treated as such. Was that a pleasant experience? They've got to think about that.

And then they've got to say these poor people they're going through the same sort of thing as we had to go through when we were slaves in Egypt. They had the same feelings now as we had then.

[49 : 55] The same distress, the same shame perhaps and so on. We must deal generously with them out of a spirit of sympathy. And that's a big part of the picture.

It's not mere generosity, it's generosity and a spirit of sympathy. It's got a friendly face attached to it. It's got a personal interest involved in it.

It's not just saying, oh I'll find you in the bank, I'll send a cheque, go off to this or that or the other. Which can be as cold as charity as the saying goes. It can be very impersonal and unfeeling.

That's not the standard of the Bible. The standard of the Bible here is that you must give with a generosity that is bred from a sense of sympathy with the poor and needy because you once were slaves in Egypt.

Now I do know that it is a wee bit difficult to do that if we haven't ourselves been in poverty. But most of us, I don't know, I'll take that back, some of us believe that we've been in relative poverty.

[51 : 02] And anyway, any sympathetic awareness of what others are going through should enable us to be sympathetic to others. And that's the thing in my mind that is so important here.

And that is, you know, something that I would think is really part of the New Testament teaching that came from Jesus. He said, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.

And it seems to me that that's working along the same lines. Our help to others isn't to be impersonal. a rule that we follow, a regulation come from God that we obey.

There's got to be personal contact in it. There's got to be personal, maybe not contact, but personal awareness in it. You give to people, you feel for them, you realise what they're going through and you don't do to them what was done to you, as in the case in Egypt.

And that, you see, makes the whole thing a very personal thing. So, the generosity that he's speaking about here is a generosity that is bred from sympathy.

[52 : 14] And it's also a generosity that is bred from the experience of grace. He says, you once were slaves in Egypt, yes, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there, therefore I command you to do this sort of thing.

It's not just that they were slaves in Egypt, it's that God took them from there. It's the thought of his grace that is dominant here. It's the awareness that he showed mercy to them, and he delivered them.

And because of that experience of grace, they are therefore being told to be generous here. And therefore that has to form the chief ingredient in their minds when they do this.

This is not a legalistic requirement. I must not take that chief in because the law tells me not to. It's something that enables them to say, I'm not going to take that chief in because somebody's going to need it and I'll leave it for them.

I remember what happened to me in Egypt and I'm not going to let it happen to anybody else here. I remember what God did for me, so I'm going to be generous to them as he was generous to me.

[53 : 26] That's the thought that lies behind you. Not a legalistic requirement, but a genuine expression, of sympathy bred from the experience of grace.

Now that I think is the way that you treat a passage like this. You go to the basic principle and you lean it carefully in case you get the wrong emphasis as the second example that we gave did. It's not about gleaning, it's about generosity. We go right to the basic principle and then we say, how do we apply that to ourselves today?

And that's what this is teaching us today. Be generous with the spirit of sympathy that is bred from the experience of grace. And ultimately what it means to us is this.

If we have said that we have experienced grace, has it made us generous to others? Has it given us sympathy with those that are still in their spiritual poverty and that they're in material poverty as well?

[54 : 32] If we say, oh I was once poor but God has made me rich, as we have every right to say we're Christian people, then has this bred in us the spirit of generosity and sympathy on the basis of that experience?

It's a question of whether we've experienced something that has not affected our lives or that this changed us significantly. It's a question of whether we've known God's grace and are letting it pervade our lives so that we become merciful because he has been merciful to us.

We've become generous because he has become generous for us. So the starting point in putting this into practice is for us to ask, have I known a similar experience of grace, an experience of grace similar to the one that these people had experienced when they came from Egypt?

Can I say I was once a slave to sin, but by grace I've been delivered. I was once held in its grip and was suffering as a result, but God came to me through the promises of the word and the work of his spirit and he set me free from that grip of sin and he made me a new creature and forgave me and made me one of his own sons and daughters.

If we haven't done that experience, there's no point in trying to be generous on the basis of this verse because it's not what it's saying. But there is every reason to say I must first of all find that experience myself and I must come as a lost sinner to Christ and rest upon his mercy so that I can look back and say God was merciful, I'm going to be merciful too.

[56 : 22] So we start with that, have I known this experience of grace and then we ask am I working this out in daily experience in such a way that it becomes evident that I'm a merciful person because I've received mercy.

And that's the problem you see sometimes, that it hasn't permeated to this sort of level of our experience. Yes, the experience of grace has made us attend church and it's made us come to the prayer meetings and it's made us do other things and that's fine, that's all in order but it hasn't done this, that it's set out in the Old Testament scriptures and in the New Testament scriptures as well.

The day of judgment is depicted by Jesus in Matthew 25 I think it is. What's the distinction made between those who have clothed the poor and visited the sick and looked after those in prison and those that haven't, to those that have been kind and compassionate because God has been kind and compassionate to them.

Okay, that's the message then. That's the way to interpret these passages. Don't just throw them aside and say they don't count for anything. Prayerfully ask yourself, what is the big idea here and how can I apply it to my life today and in regard to this one.

Have I experienced the experience of grace? Then may that permeate my life to such a degree that I've asked sympathy for the poor and needy and that I'm generous out of that experience of grace.

[57 : 51] May God bless to us his word. Now, let's sing in Psalm 36, which is the psalm that speaks very much of God's grace. Psalm 36, verse 6 to verse 10.

Lord, oops, that's not it. Your righteousness is very great like mountains high and steep. Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast you keep.

How precious is your steadfast love, what confidence it brings. Both high and low find shelter in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 36, verses 6 to 10.

verse 6 to 10.

Canaan catch on the name of the atac Carl Christopher King, patriot and baix and ■■■■ increase in the protection of the water.

[59 : 29] and sheltered in the shadow on your wings.

Live each within your hearts and reign from streams of your delight.

For with you is the source of life in your light we see light.

To those who know you rise in love to save us love and power.

May you raise your righteousness to those of pure and of bright light.

[60 : 55] Grace, mercy and peace from God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.