

Reflecting God's Grace

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[0 : 00] Moses says, What's more, God has now brought them to this promised land, which is God's gift to them.

And not because they deserve it, but again, because of his grace, his undeserved generosity to them. And they were to respond to God's grace by obeying all these laws in the book of Deuteronomy.

But particularly today, they were to respond by reflecting that same grace to others. Just as God had given to them freedom from Egypt and this land, so they were to give to one another and to God himself.

And we know that this is the big idea of the section because the idea of giving keeps coming up again and again. It runs through our whole passage today. So last week, we actually finished at chapter 14, verse 21, at the top of page 191.

And so the next section starts at chapter 14, verse 22. And it continues to the end of chapter 15. It's all about giving. Just look at the headings in your Bibles for a moment. Chapter 14, verse 22 is about giving tithes to God at the temple.

[1 : 21] And then at chapter 15, verse 1, it's about giving freedom from debts, cancelling debts, or literally giving release to Israelites who owed money.

And then towards the bottom right-hand corner of your Bibles, chapter 15, verse 12, it's about giving freedom to Israelite slaves. And then over the page, at the end of the chapter, it's about giving the firstborn animals to God, the best of the flock, the herd, the cream of the crop.

You see, it's all about giving. Israel was to respond to God's generosity to them by being generous to others, to one another, and to God. Now, we're not going to have time to look at this whole section, so we're going to focus on what the section focuses on, which is actually giving to one another.

You see, even the instructions about tithing to God actually end up including a concern to give to each other. We see that in chapter 14, verse 28 and 29, where the tithe every three years is set aside for those who are poor in the land.

What's more, we can see this focus by the whole structure of the section. So on the next slide, this is how it breaks up. Giving to God begins and ends, and the important part, the meat in the middle, if you like, is all about giving to fellow Israelites, whether it's release from debts or release from slavery.

[2 : 48] And so that's the focus of the passage, and that's what we're going to look at tonight. So in your outlines, we're going to skip over point one and go straight to point two on your outlines, and chapter 15, verse 1 in your Bibles.

Have a look there, chapter 15, verse 1. He writes, Every seven years, the Reserve Bank issues a decree to cancel debts, and all the banks would have to follow, unlike the interest rates they only occasionally follow.

Now, I'm not sure what that would do to the economy, having spoken to a banker. But notice here, this cancellation of debts, or literally this release from debts, was only for fellow Israelites, do you notice?

So maybe in our age, it could just be for Christians. Just Christians would get their debts, that would be great. Of course, the law is actually narrowed even more than that. It's just for the poor among God's people, perhaps like the fatherless or the widows that are mentioned in the verse before, in the chapter 14.

Those who have no husband or father to provide for them, and so they need to get a loan. Now, this act of releasing debts is a great act of generosity on the person who gave the loan, because Israelites were not to charge their fellow Israelites any interest on the loan.

[4 : 40] And so the person who gave it, they don't make any money out of it. And what's more, when the seventh year came around, they would cancel the debts. And so they would lose any money remaining outstanding.

And so it's quite an act of generosity, you see. But they had to be generous because God has been generous to them. How? Well, by creating them to start with, and then saving them to be his treasured possession, his holy people, and giving them this land to enjoy rest in.

You see, this release from this debt happened every how many years, was it? Seven. Great. I'm just making sure you're still with me. Every seventh year. Now, what else in the Old Testament happened every seventh day?

Rest, the Sabbath day. Yeah. And that's what the word Sabbath means. It means to rest. Now, in the Bible, rest is more than just stopping work. I mean, once, you know, one of the things about the weekend is not just that we stop work.

It's that we have a chance to spend time with the family and enjoy life, give the mums a break and have a nice day out and so on. Although we can pack so much into our weekends these days, it feels like work.

[5 : 57] But in the Bible, rest is about enjoying the good life, which is fellowship with God and with one another, the Christian family. And that's why when the Sabbath commandment was first given, it was based on the seventh day of creation, where God rested from creating.

And those he created started enjoying life and fellowship with him and each other. So on the next slide, you've got that kind of... So we'll keep going, Aidan. Yeah, this one.

So first time the Sabbath day is mentioned, notice in Exodus, it's based on creation, the idea of rest. And it wasn't just that God stopped creating, it was that he stopped creating and they started enjoying the life he created.

Do you remember Genesis? Once he created mankind, it was very good. And then Adam and Eve were to enjoy fellowship with God in the garden, the good life. Of course, sin spoilt everything.

And so in Deuteronomy, as you can see, when the Sabbath day commandment is given again, this time is based on God saving them from Egypt, so that they could enter the promised land and enjoy his rest, the good life in fellowship with God and each other.

[7 : 10] So the point of the Sabbath commandment was to remember that God had graciously created them and saved them for rest with him, to enjoy fellowship with him and each other in the land.

In fact, the promised land is also called the resting place. in Deuteronomy chapter 12. Now, they didn't deserve to be created or to be saved, but God did it anyway, so that they could enjoy rest with him.

And so every seven years, they were to remember the rest God that God had graciously created and saved them for. And in response to his graciousness to them, they were to reflect God's grace by releasing the poor from their debts every seven years, so that everyone could enjoy God's rest in the land.

I mean, it's a bit hard to enjoy the good life in the land when you're in debt, isn't it? Of course, if Israel did the right thing, then no one would need a loan, because there'd be no poor among them.

Have a look at verses four to six. However, there need be no poor people among you. Why? Well, for or because in the land, the Lord, your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance.

[8 : 24] He will richly bless you. If only you obey, fully obey the Lord, your God, and are careful to follow all these commands I'm giving you today.

For the Lord, your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations, but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations, but none will rule over you.

Now here, it sounds like if they obey, they will earn God's rich blessings. But notice in verse six, that God has already promised them.

The blessings are God's gift to them. And so their obedience is not about earning God's blessings. It's about enjoying God's blessings. I've said this before.

It's like a parent who says to their child, I have a gift for you in the kitchen. Come follow me. And if the child obeys, they get to enjoy the gift. Their obedience doesn't earn the gift.

[9 : 26] The parent has already bought it. It's already there, sitting on the kitchen table. Rather, their obedience simply means they get to enjoy it. Of course, if they disobey and don't follow the parent, then by default, they won't enter the kitchen and receive the gift.

They said they'll get punished for disobedience, weren't they? And it's like that for Israel. God has already promised, has already got these rich blessings in store for them. So that they won't need to borrow from any nation.

They'll be rich. So rich, there doesn't need to be any poor among them. The problem is, to enjoy those blessings that God already has for them, they need to trust God.

They need to obey God. Because if they disobey, well, God will be forced to punish them instead. And by default, they'll miss out on the blessings he's got in store for them.

And that means there will also be poor people amongst them. Now, sadly, Moses knows Israel's track record. He knows they won't obey. So he knows there will be poor people in the land.

[10 : 32] So Moses says, since there will be poor people in the land, then you are to act like God and reflect his grace, his undeserved generosity to them as well. Have a look at verses 7 to 11.

And as I read, look at all the words that speak about being generous or not being stingy. So verse 7, if anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land, the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard hearted or tight fisted towards them.

Rather, be open handed and freely lend them whatever they need. Be careful not to harbour this wicked thought. Oh, the seventh year, the year of cancelling debts is near so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing.

They may then appeal to the Lord against you and you will be found guilty of sin. Rather, give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart.

Then because of this, the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land because sadly they're going to disobey. Therefore, I command you to be open handed towards your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

[11:50] Do you notice all the words that talk about being generous, open handed, giving generously, freely, not being hard hearted, tight fisted. You see, they are to reflect God's generosity, God's grace that he has shown them.

They are to give generously without a grudging heart. You see, just as God has created them graciously and graciously saved them and given them this land that they're about to enter, so too they are to graciously and generously give to those in need.

Even if the seventh year of cancellation is around the corner and they get nothing back from the people they've loaned to, they are still to give generously by releasing debts.

And they give generously when it comes to releasing slaves as well. Point three in your outline, verse 12 in your Bible. If any of your people, Hebrew men or women, sell themselves to you and serve you six years, in the seventh year, you must let them go free, he says.

We've got to remember that slavery in the Old Testament was very different to the slavery we think of. You know, the African-American slavery of Wilberforce and so on.

[13:01] It's not like that. In fact, in the Bible, Israelites were to treat fellow Israelites, not as slaves, but more like hired servants. So I think on the next slide is a verse from chapter 25 of Leviticus, which talks about that.

So slavery in the Old Testament, was much more humane. It was much more akin to being like a nanny or a butler, you know, a living babysitter, an au pair, who lived full time with the family, but of course was paid even more poorly than nannies are today, presumably to help pay off their debts.

But again, in the seventh year, Israel was to release their slaves, their servants, so that all God's people, even the poor who sold themselves, got to enjoy God's rest, the good life.

He had created and saved them for. What's more, the masters were to be generous or open handed towards them, so that the slaves didn't leave empty handed.

See verse 13. And when you release them, do not send them away empty handed. Rather, supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press.

[14:11] Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you or given to you, he says. You see again, this idea of grace, generosity, giving generously, even though they may not deserve it.

After all, the slaves just done their job. Why is Israel to do this? Well, again, because of God's grace to them. Do you see verse 15? Remember, remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you.

That is why I give you this command today. You see, God graciously released Israel from slavery. And so in response, they had to reflect God's grace to one another and release their fellow Israelites from slavery.

And like before, they had to do so without a grudging heart, without a wicked thought, or thinking that this is unfair. Have a look at verses 16 to 18. But if your servant says to you, I do not want to leave you because he loves you and your family and is well off with you.

It's very different to African-American slavery. Then take an awl and push it through his earlobe into the door. And it will become your servant. He doesn't stay on the door. Someone had Bible study said, does he just stay?

[15:25] No, he doesn't stay there on the door. It's just a mark, an earring, a mark that he's your servant. But notice what the master does in verse 18. Do not, master, consider it a hardship to set your servant free because this service to you, these six years, has been worth twice as much as that of a hired hand.

And the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do. You see, they had to set them free with gifts and without a grudging heart. That considers it a hardship.

After all, they have benefited from their service. And what's more, God will bless them anyway. He won't let them go without. Well, in verses 19 to 23, Moses returns to the idea of giving to God.

As I showed you at the start, it's kind of giving to God, then giving to each other, cancelling debts, giving to each other, releasing slaves. And then here, he returns to giving to God. But we've got a full service today.

So let me just move to the last point on your outlines and think about what does all this mean for us. And the first thing we need to do is remember that God has been generous to us, as we heard in the kids talk.

- [16:35] He has both created us. Even though he knew we would sin, he still went ahead and created us. And then he saved us from sin. And indeed, he gave us every spiritual blessing there is.

And so the next slide is a verse from Ephesians, where it begins by saying, And then he goes on to say, In Christ, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he has lavished on us.

Do you see how extravagant God's generosity is? That he has lavished on us. Just keep that up for a bit, Aidan. God's grace, his undeserved generosity has been poured over us.

We're covered with a dripping in it. It's a picture of extravagant generosity. I once heard a story of a family who was doing it tough. The parents had a small farm in the US and a 15-year-old daughter called Sandy, who was suffering from leukemia.

And so with the medical bills mounting up and her parents doing it tough, Sandy decides to sell her pet calf at the auctions to try and get some money. Reluctantly, Mum and Dad load up the trailer with the calf and head off to the auction, the sale yards.

- [18:05] They figure it's worth about \$200. The auctioneer, however, knows their situation. And so before he pulls the calf up for sale, he says to the crowd, Look, I hope you don't mind me saying this, everyone.

But Sandy here is doing it tough. She's not well and her family has lots of medical bills and expenses. And she's selling her pet calf here to try and help get a bit of cash. And so the auctioneer starts and the bids go to \$200, the price the calf is worth.

But then it keeps going up to \$500, \$1,000. And then it is sold for \$2,000. Sandy and her family are astonished.

But then the man who bought it for \$2,000 says, I'll pay for it now and I'll give it back and we'll auction it again. And so that's what they did. And according to the book that I got this story from, apparently a true story, they sold the calf 10 times that day and Sandy went home with \$20,000 and her pet calf.

The family were overwhelmed and rejoice in their community's generosity. It's a picture of extravagant generosity, isn't it? And yet God's generosity to us is even more extravagant.

- [19:19] It's just we've heard it so many times we forget. For he gave more than \$20,000. He gave his only son. And Christ's blood paid for our sins, redeemed us, forgave us, so that we could be released from the punishment that our sins deserve.

So that we could have the certainty of heaven. And what's more, God then blessed us with every spiritual blessing there is in this life. And with every physical blessing to look forward to in the next life.

That's extravagant generosity. Now, do we deserve that? No, we didn't. In fact, the Bible says that Christ died for us while we were still sinners, while we were still God's enemies, who ignored God and rejected him.

Can't get much more undeserving than that. But you see how gracious God is? He's undeserved generosity to us. As Paul writes on the next slide from 2 Corinthians chapter 8, he says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.

So that through his poverty, you might become rich. Not with money, but with every spiritual blessing in this life, and every physical blessing in the life to come.

[20:38] Of course, the Bible makes it clear that this is only available for those who believe. So can I ask, do you? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust in him for life?

For us who do, then we are to respond to God's grace, his undeserved generosity, in a number of ways, but certainly today, by reflecting it to others, especially to our fellow Christians in need, just like Israel, to their fellow Israelites in need.

You see, a chapter after Paul writes this verse on the screen there, was our Bible reading, where Paul reminded the Corinthians about how they were to give generously in response to God's generosity to them.

And like Israel, they were to do so without a grudging heart, but cheerfully. Do you remember our second reading? On the next slide was a verse from it. It said this, The word for cheerful here is the word hileros, from which it's connected to our word hilarious.

I'm not sure it's saying that God loves the hilarious giver. You know, although, but we're certainly not to give grudgingly, as Deuteronomy says, or reluctantly, as Paul says, but cheerfully.

[22:10] Of course, giving away money means there's less for us. And it's hard to do. I mean, remember the kids talk, do you want a lolly? Or generosity? I want a lolly! It's hard to part with what we have, even though it's all from God to start with.

And so Paul goes on in our second reading, on the next slide, to remind them that God is still able to provide for our needs as well, so that we can give generously. He says, and God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all you need, you can still abound in every good work.

You can still be generous. You'll be enriched in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. In other words, God will continue to bless you, so that you'll have all that you need.

And even more, not to keep for ourselves, like the prosperity gospel, no, no, but to keep being generous. Sometimes what God gives us, is a generous heart, not more money.

But we need to keep giving to those in need, whether without time, or gifts, or money. And notice it will lead people to thank and praise God, as it rightly deserves to be. And so, are we generous, to our fellow Christians in need?

[23:27] In response to God's grace to us, are we gracious to others? Like my daughter, who responded to my so-called generosity, it was kind of generous to a sister. Or more so, like the Israelites were to be generous, to their fellow Israelites.

And remember, it's not about the amount, it's about being generous, with whatever amount we have. So are we trusting, that God will still provide? And are we therefore being generous, to one another in need?

And can I say that, over the years, I think you are. I've been really encouraged, over the years, to see how many of you are generous, to one another in need, in both small ways, and big ways.

I know one man, from Nine O'Clock Church, who gives of his time generously, to help maintain, the Wycliffe Bible Translation School, up at Kangaroo Ground. So that fellow Christians, who need a Bible overseas, in their own language, will one day get one.

That's terrific. I've seen others, from our own congregation, give of their time, to help others move house, or give of their resources, like a trailer in one case, to help a fellow Christian need.

[24 : 33] I've seen people give meals, for one another, who are doing it tough. Or just had a baby. Which is the same thing, isn't it? I've seen people give money, so as a family in need, could have their house cleaned.

Or in another case, I remember one family, from our congregation, buying an oven for another, when their own oven died. And then a separate family, where the husband was an electrician, installing it. All for free, without a grudging heart.

And I'm still overwhelmed, by one family, when we went away, on holidays one time, and we came home, and found that, they had renovated our bathroom, while we were away. I still can't believe, you did that guys, Adam and Mel.

But you see, these are all ways, in which you are reflecting, God's grace to you. His undeserved generosity. And for that, people thank God, for you.

And so can I encourage you, to keep reflecting his grace, towards one another. Keep being generous, to those fellow Christians, in need. For that will not only mean, more thanks and praise for God, but it will be a great witness, to the world.

[25 : 41] Just as Moses said of Israel, in chapter 4, other nations will hear, about these decrees, like giving to your fellow Israelites, and say, surely this is a great nation. Or as Jesus himself said, by this shall all people know, that you are my disciples, if you have love, one for another.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, Father, we thank you, that you are, a gracious Heavenly Father. We thank you, for your grace towards us, in the Lord Jesus.

And so Father, we pray that you would help us, to remember it, to realize how extravagant it is, but more than that, to reflect it, to one another in need. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.