

Living Distinctively in a Fallen World

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 June 2018

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 0 0] chapter 21. If you are in a pew Bible, that's page number 62. We've been going through the book of Exodus this year, and we've seen that the God of the Bible is a God who saves, right?

He saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and He has saved us from sin and death through the resurrection, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we've also seen that the God who saves us sustains us. God sustained the people of Israel through the wilderness, and He continues to sustain and provide for us by His Holy Spirit and His grace. And we've also seen that the same God who saves and sustains us also instructs us in His laws. For the last two weeks, we've looked at the Ten Commandments, the heart of God's moral law, which teaches us to love God above everything else and love our neighbor as ourselves. Now, for the next four Sundays, during this month of June, we're focusing in on God's wise instructions for His redeemed people in Exodus 21 through 23. So today, we're looking at a long section of chapter 21 and most of chapter 22.

I won't read all of it, but let's begin by reading chapter 21, starting at verse 1. Here we go. Now, these are the rules that you shall set before them. Now, God is speaking to Moses to then speak to the people of Israel. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free, then his master will bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever. When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master who has designated her for himself, he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people since he has broken faith with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, clothing, or marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing without payment of money. Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee.

But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar that he may die. Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death. Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death. Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death. When men quarrel, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and the man does not die but takes to his bed, then if the man rises again and walks outdoors with his staff, he who struck him shall be clear. Only he shall pay for the loss of his time and shall have him thoroughly healed. When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money. When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. I'm going to stop there. Now, one of our commitments at Trinity Baptist Church is to preach or teach the whole counsel of God. That is, all of the truths that God has revealed to us in the different books and sections of the Bible. And often we do that by preaching through whole books of the Bible without skipping anything. And so, we come to this morning's passage that we might not dare to tackle if each of the preachers just got to choose a different text each Sunday on our own. Now, a handful of you are lawyers or law school students, and some of you might be fascinated by this. But most people who try to read straight through the Bible come to passages like this, and their eyes start to glaze over, and—or maybe you're thinking, yikes, some of these laws sound really harsh. Slavery, the death penalty for cursing your parents, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Can I really trust that these laws come from a good and just and wise God? But here's the thing. If the whole Bible is God's Word for us, then God has something good for us here in these chapters, no matter how strange and alien they may seem. So, this morning I want us to take a deeper look at these chapters that are easy to misunderstand because we don't live in that cultural context, or we can be tempted to just ignore and overlook because we don't know what to do with them. Now, a bit of the big picture.

Back in chapter 19, verse 6, God said to the people of Israel, you are to be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation. In other words, God was calling the Israelites to reflect His distinctive character, His wisdom and justice and love to the surrounding nations. And this section in particular is teaching the Israelites how to reflect God's character in their life together as a civil society, as a nation.

[5 : 46] Now, these laws we're looking at today were specifically intended for the Old Testament people of Israel. They don't apply directly to the Christian church because the Christian church is not a nation state. Jesus Christ did not tell His disciples to set up a king and get a military force together and take a piece of land and from there expand the Christian kingdom throughout the earth. No.

He never said that. In fact, the disciples seem to have had that idea, and Jesus said no. They said, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel? And He said, no, but I'll give you the Holy Spirit, and you will go to the ends of the earth and bear witness to me as the Savior and Lord.

So, these laws are also not meant to be directly implemented by modern governments, because modern governments do not have the authority or are not given the responsibility to... No modern nation state is God's kingdom of priests and God's holy nation on earth.

And modern governments have the responsibility to administer justice, Romans 13, tells us that. But God has not authorized any government to enforce the laws of the New Testament, to compel people to come to church or compel people to obey the particular commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said Christians are exiles scattered among the nations. We live in loyalty to Jesus, but we live throughout all the nations of the world. So, then you might ask, well, wait a minute. Okay, if these chapters don't apply directly to the church, and they don't apply directly to modern governments, then are they really any use for us at all? And the answer to that is yes, because they show us God's wisdom in applying the principles of His moral law within a particular historical and cultural context. And don't we need God's wisdom to apply the Ten Commandments, for example, to our own lives and our own habits and our life as a Christian community, as a church, our own particular circumstances? Second reason these laws are helpful is they don't just tell us how God wants us to live ideally, but also how to deal with some of the realities of life in a messy and broken world. The section we're looking at today is sometimes called the case law because it outlines common situations, common cases that the ancient Israelites would have faced, and it gives guidance about how to pursue justice on a case-by-case kind of basis.

First one says, these are the rules. That word can also be translated judgments or judicial rulings. In other words, the case law sets a judicial precedent for how to deal with other similar situations that may arise. But I want you to notice just from the start that every situation mentioned in these chapters is a result of living in a fallen world. Notice how the paragraphs begin.

[8 : 58] Verse 2, when you buy a Hebrew slave. Verse 10, when a man sells his daughter as a slave. Verse 12 to 17 have a different structure. We'll look at that later on. But verse 18, when men quarrel and one strikes the other. Verse 20, when a man strikes his slave and the slave dies.

Verse 22, when men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, an innocent bystander. Verse 28, when an ox gores a man or a woman to death. Verse 33, when someone falls into a pit.

Chapter 22, verse 1, if a man steals an ox or a sheep, every one of these situations, including, by the way, slavery, is a result of living in a fallen world.

None of these situations would occur if we were still living in the Garden of Eden and harmony with God and in a right relationship with each other. But you see, when God saves us, God doesn't magically transport us out of our sinful flesh and this broken world. We still have to deal with potentially oppressive work situations, quarrels and fights, car accidents, wildfires, things that get lost or stolen, etc., etc., etc., etc. And what we see here is that God makes provision for us in the midst of a messy world.

He doesn't promise a utopia, then or now, but He does show us a way forward, one step at a time toward His redemptive and righteous purposes.

[10 : 33] So the laws we're looking at today are not God's last or only word on these topics, but they do show us God's wisdom in applying the law in concrete situations and in responding redemptively to the realities of a fallen world.

As we go through these chapters, I want to do two basic things as we go along. I want to point out some of the ways that Israel's laws distinctively reflected God's character in their historical context.

So I'm going to mention some comparisons to other laws of other nations of that time, of the ancient Near East. And we'll see some ways that the laws distinctively reflected God's character.

And second, I want us to consider God's intention for us here and now. We won't be implementing these laws directly, but we need to consider how we're called to live distinctly as followers of Jesus Christ.

As we heard earlier from the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, you're to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city on a hill, a distinct people who bear witness to the goodness and glory of God.

[11 : 46] Now, there are five categories of laws that we're going to look at this morning. First, laws about slaves. First, I'm going to spend a longer time on the slavery laws because those are more complicated and more fraught in our context.

Second, there's laws about capital punishment. Third, laws about bodily injury. Fourth, laws about lost or stolen property. And fifth, a law about premarital sex. We're going all over the place today.

All right, so let's dive in. First, the laws about slavery, chapter 21, 1 to 11. Now, for those of us who are Americans, we can have trouble with Bible passages about slavery in part because of our own country's history.

When many of us hear the word slavery, we think about Africans who were kidnapped by slave traders, taken across the Atlantic Ocean, treated as less than human, often separated from their wives and children, and enslaved for life without a real possibility of freedom.

Now, even though slavery was abolished over 150 years ago, we still wrestle as a nation with its many twisted legacies. And even in the church, it can be an ongoing struggle to build deep trust and relationships among Christians of different races.

[13 : 06] And that's something we need to keep working on by God's grace and with patient endurance. But when we read about slavery in the Bible, we need to take a step back from our own country's history and try to understand it for what it was back then.

Let me make four points to help us do that. First, the Bible acknowledges the reality of slavery in a fallen world, but it does not say that God instituted slavery as part of the natural order.

God instituted marriage from the beginning. God gave human beings meaningful work to do from the beginning. After the flood, God instituted government in Genesis 9.

But we never see God instituting slavery or defending it as something that should necessarily be preserved. Second, the word slave is hard to translate precisely.

It can mean a household servant. It can mean an employee. It can mean an apprentice as well as a slave. Some slaves had no authority at all, while others had considerable responsibility within a household.

[14 : 18] Back then, pretty much every business ran out of a household, and most of the household workers lived either on the premises or right nearby. So very often, your boss was also your landlord, and your workplace was also your home.

That's just how life was. Third, it's helpful to understand how people in Israel became slaves in the first place. There were basically two reasons.

First, you might grow up in desperate poverty. Some children might have grown up with slaves as their parents. Or chapter 21, verse 7, talks about a father who sells his child into slavery, probably because the parents were desperate and had no way to provide for the child's needs.

A bit like a child today who ends up in foster care. So you might grow up in desperate poverty and end up in slavery, or you might end up in desperate poverty either through your own fault or otherwise.

Chapter 22, verse 3, says that sometimes people were sold into slavery because they had stolen something and they were not able to make restitution.

[15 : 30] They were not able to pay the person back who they had wronged. And so the law said they would be sold into slavery. Someone would pay a price up front, and that would pay off their debt, and then they'd be a slave for a time.

Leviticus 25 talks about someone who becomes poor and sells himself into slavery. Sort of voluntarily enters into that agreement. Perhaps, again, if you're in debt, that's the only way to deal with your debts.

Now, the one thing that was absolutely prohibited was kidnapping someone and selling them into slavery. That's what happened to Joseph in the book of Genesis.

That's what happened to many slaves who were brought to the United States. And sadly, it continues to happen throughout the world today, especially to children. But this is something that God hates.

Verse 16 prescribes the death penalty for anyone who steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him. Talk about a strong law against the slave trade.

[16 : 35] It was already there in ancient Israel. Fourth, we should notice how God's laws protected slaves in Israel. One of the things God says over and over to his people is this.

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and I brought you out of there. The people of Israel had experienced oppressive and cruel masters, taskmasters, and they had experienced the gracious deliverance of God.

And so one of God's first priorities in their society was to make sure that slaves in Israel would never be treated like the Israelites had been in Egypt.

That's actually why the laws about slaves come first in the civil law of Israel. In many other law codes from the ancient Near East, like the Code of Hammurabi, the laws about slaves come last, and they mostly focus on the importance of catching slaves who run away.

In most other societies of the time, slaves had few or no legal protections, but not so in Israel. Consider five ways that God's law protected the rights of slaves.

[17 : 52] First, the Fourth Commandment specified that slaves, just like everyone else in Israelite society, got a full day off every week on the Sabbath. That was not the case in any other ancient society.

It's not even the case for many people today. Second, with the exception of those captured in war, Hebrew slavery was temporary rather than permanent.

Verse 2, When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. So in one sense, slavery back then was a bit like enlisting in the military today.

When you enlist in the military, you sign a contract, and your life is not your own anymore. You go where your officer tells you to go. You move where your officer tells you to move. You work whatever hours the military sets for you.

But when you finish your years of service, you're free to go. Another modern analogy could be Job Corps, even though that's only for a year or two. And Deuteronomy 15 said that when a slave goes out after serving six years, it says, You shall not send him away empty-handed.

[19 : 08] Supply him generously out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress, because you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you. You see, according to God's law, slavery in Israel was meant to be a way for people who had either grown up in desperate poverty or fallen into desperate poverty to get out of crushing debt, to have a roof over their head and food in their stomachs in the meantime, to learn skills and grow in self-discipline, and after six years, they'd have the chance for a fresh start.

If you'd followed these laws, that's what slavery would have looked like within Israel. Now, verse 7 might seem like it's saying that female slaves, unlike male slaves, don't go free after six years.

You might say, What's the deal with that? But that's actually not the case. Deuteronomy 15, verse 13 and following, specifies that the six-year rule applies to both male and female slaves.

Verses 7 to 11 in this chapter are about a woman who becomes both a household servant and a wife to either the father, the head of the family, or one of his sons.

And the reason why she doesn't go out after six years is because marriage is not a six-year contract. Marriage is a lifelong arrangement in God's design.

[20 : 37] Third, Hebrew slavery honored the integrity of slave families. Another difference with much American slavery.

If he comes in single, he shall go out single, verse 3. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. But then you might say, What about verse 4? Verse 4 seems to present a problem.

The boss allows his worker to marry another worker, and now they have kids, and the guy's six-year contract is up, but he can't take his wife and kids with him. I mean, what's that about? Well, the boss has rights too.

You see, the worker can't just walk off with his wife and kids if they still have time on their contract, if the wife hasn't reached her six years yet. So the man owes the boss's family for the loss of his wife's services.

So he really has three options. One, he can presumably wait until his wife's six-year contract is up, and then they can go free together. Although that might be an option if his wife was a captive in war.

[21 : 48] Second option, he can go out, make money, come back, and buy his wife and kids out of the rest of their contract obligation. Third option, he can take the option of verses five and six.

He can say, we've got a good thing going here, so let's settle here for good. So those are the three options in those cases.

So slaves get the Sabbath day. Hebrew slavery was temporary rather than permanent. Hebrew slavery honored the integrity of slave families. Fourth, God's law protected female slaves, arguably the most vulnerable people in the ancient world.

Verses eight to 11 envision three situations where a daughter sold into slavery might be particularly vulnerable. First situation, the master, the head of the household, takes her as a wife and then decides he is not pleased with her.

In other words, he decides to divorce her. That's not a good thing. Verse eight says, he has broken faith with her. God hates divorce.

[22 : 59] But God cares for women whose husbands have broken faith and abandoned their marriage and left them alone. And today, as most divorces are initiated by women, we should say God cares for men as well whose wives have broken faith and abandoned their marriage.

The provision here for the woman is he must let her be redeemed. That is, he must let one of her relatives take responsibility to care for her and not sell her to strangers who would not have her best interests at heart.

That's the protection in the first instance. Second situation, the master designates her for his son. In other words, she becomes the wife of one of the sons in the family.

In this case, the law says she is no longer merely a slave. She has all the rights and privileges of a daughter in the family. Third situation, the master takes another wife to himself.

Again, this is not a good thing. We are dealing with situations that happen in a messy, broken, fallen world. Polygamy was never God's intention.

[24 : 10] The Bible never promotes it. It shows all kinds of bad consequences of it. But it happened, and so God's law protected women who found themselves in that situation.

In this case, her husband owes her food, clothing, and marital rights. Provision, protection, and physical expressions of love. If he doesn't do those things, she can go free, which presumably means she would be free to marry someone else.

Because he has failed to live up to the marriage, the promise to provide and protect for her. So, God's law protected female slaves who often found themselves in the most vulnerable and difficult situations of all.

And fifth, slaves in Israel had legal recourse in the case of serious injury or death. Verse 20 and 21, verse 20 tells us that if a man strikes a slave with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, that is what, immediately, that is considered intentional homicide, and the master deserves the death penalty.

That's what it means, he shall be avenged. Now, verse 21 is making a distinction between murder and manslaughter. Intentional, willful murder that deserves the death penalty and manslaughter, which doesn't.

[25 : 37] If the slave doesn't die immediately but survives a day or two before dying, that's considered manslaughter. And the reason given is for the slave is his money.

Now, that is a very jarring phrase, and it was taken completely out of context and abused in the history of this country. But that phrase is not denying the full humanity of the slave. It's simply a shorthand way of saying a boss has a financial interest in his workers staying alive.

So it's likely that he didn't actually intend to kill the slave, and so he shouldn't be prosecuted for intentional homicide. Now, verses 26 and 27 give more protections to a slave.

If a man destroys a slave's eye, that's an example of an injury with significant future implications, or even if he knocks out a slave's tooth, an injury with relatively minor future implications, in either case, he shall immediately let the slave go free.

No other law codes in the ancient world had a provision anything like verse 26 and 27. Protecting slaves against permanent bodily injury.

[26 : 58] By giving them the right to immediate liberation. You see, slavery was not in itself a good thing. But God's laws protected slaves in Israel because God had identified with a nation of slaves who were being oppressed under cruel bondage.

And God chose to deliver them and make them his own. And today, God still identifies with people who are poor and desperate and vulnerable and who cry out to him and place their hope in him.

And God is still the same God who protects and provides for the most vulnerable in society. So that's the first section of laws. Next sections, we're going to go more quickly.

Next section of laws concerns capital offenses, verses 12 through 17, and also chapter 22, verses 18 through 20. Now, if you notice, these laws are worded differently than the others because they are not less than ideal situations that God is willing to temporarily tolerate while mitigating some of the most harmful consequences of them.

Rather, these are deeply wicked behaviors that have no place among the people of God, that God is very serious about. These are blatant violations of the Ten Commandments.

[28 : 19] Verse 12, premeditated murder. Again, verse 13, distinguishes that manslaughter is a different case. Premeditated murder deserved the death penalty in ancient Israel.

Now, one of the ways that this law distinctively reflected God's character is that in other ancient Near Eastern law codes, murder was only punishable by death if the victim was of equal or higher social status.

If the victim was of a lower social status, you only had to pay a fine. Or, in some cases, a lower class member of your household was put to death instead.

But in the Bible, the punishment for violent crimes does not vary according to the social status of the victim. Because the God of the Bible is no respecter of persons.

Proverbs says, the rich and the poor meet together because the Lord is the maker of them all. Every human being bears the image of God. And so this law is whoever.

[29 : 30] Young or old, rich or poor, male or female, slave or free. Now, verses 15 and 17 also prescribe the death penalty for striking or cursing one's father or mother.

It's not just referring to a careless word or a one-time slap in the face, disrespectful as those things are. This is referring to a serious physical assault.

Most likely with intent to kill, that's how the word strike is most often used, even if the parent doesn't actually die. Or an out-and-out rejection of one's parents, cursing them, publicly disowning them, wishing they were dead.

And God says that kind of behavior cannot be tolerated. Because how will God's holy nation hold together if its families are continually tearing themselves apart?

Now, we live in an age where it's pretty common to disrespect authority, but the Christian community is called to be distinctive in showing respect for the authorities that God has placed over us, beginning with children and adults honoring, respecting, their father and mother.

[30 : 45] chapter 22, 18 through 20 lists three additional capital offenses. Sorcery, that is witchcraft or magic, trying to control or manipulate God by channeling spiritual powers.

Bestiality, this is also connected with idolatrous worship and it lowers people to the level of animals. And three, idolatry, sacrificing to any God other than the Lord.

Chapter 21, 12 to 17, is three offenses against human beings and chapter 22, 18 through 20 are three offenses against God. They're all blatant violations of the Ten Commandments and they're deeply destructive and dishonoring behaviors and God wanted them to have no place among His redeemed people.

Now, you might ask, what does the New Testament say along these lines? Again, the church is never authorized to use physical force, so the church should never be administering the death penalty.

But, what the New Testament does say is that if someone professes to be a Christian and yet persists in serious and unrepentant sin that violates one of God's clear moral laws, the church is instructed to remove them from the membership of the church, to no longer treat them as a fellow believer.

[32 : 09] to say you are not living in accordance with the new covenant in Jesus Christ, we can no longer call you a brother or sister in Christ. We will respect you as a human being, but you may no longer call yourself a fellow believer if you continue to persistently act in destructive and dishonoring ways.

Third category, bodily injury, verses 18 to 36, the rest of chapter 21. Now, broadly speaking, this section goes from more to less serious. Verses 18 to 27, a human injures another human.

Verses 28 to 32, an animal injures a human. Verses 33 to 34, a human injures an animal. Verses 35 to 36, an animal injures an animal. You could also say verses 18 to 27 are about sins of commission, that is, actions that cause harm to someone else.

Verses 28 to 36 are sins of omission, that is, negligence. You're causing harm to somebody else by doing nothing when you should do something. And one thing we see is just because you didn't intend to harm somebody doesn't mean you're not responsible for the consequences of your actions or words.

and just because you did nothing doesn't mean you're blameless if you had a responsibility to do something. God takes negligence seriously as well as active malice or harm.

[33 : 48] Now, I'm not going to go through each of these sections in detail, but I want us to look at the main principle for this section found in verse 23 to 25, which is also a verse that has been widely misunderstood.

That is what's called the lex talionis, that is the law of retaliation, right? Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc., etc. Two clarifications.

Number one, these verses do not justify private vendettas or family feuds. Actually, that's in part what they were intended to guard against.

In the ancient world, there were all kinds of ongoing feuds between clans and tribes. And what happens in a feud or a vendetta?

It's not equal. It's not, I pay you back exactly as you pay me back. It escalates. You insulted me, I'll beat you up.

[34 : 49] You beat me up, I'll... It goes on and on, right? You always try to one-up whoever hurt you last. And these verses are trying to stop that cycle of revenge and saying these matters need to be brought before the judges and the punishment should correspond exactly to the crime and no more.

Second clarification, these verses are not actually recommending literal, physical mutilation. compensation. There is no record in the Bible or anywhere else of anyone in ancient Israel who was punished by having his tooth knocked out or his eye gouged out or his hand cut off or being burned or anything like that.

The principle is the law was never applied in that way. It was actually never meant to be applied in that way. The principle is compensation should correspond as precisely as possible to the damage inflicted.

Notice it says you shall pay eye for eye, tooth for tooth. So the question is what is an appropriate payment given the damages?

In verses 26 and 27 immediately following verse 25 we have one example of that. A master knocks out a slave's tooth or gouges out his eye.

[36 : 18] What's the punishment? The slave goes free immediately. That is one example of an appropriate compensation that the law provides.

And in other situations the judges had to determine what's an appropriate compensation monetary or otherwise. In the case of premeditated murder no monetary payment could suffice in ancient Israel.

Numbers 35 31 says you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer. But the interesting thing about that verse is it seems to assume that every other kind of damage or injury can be compensated somehow.

You just have to figure out how. Now how does that apply to Christians? Well of course Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount goes one step further. He says you have heard that it was said eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

And some people misunderstood that back then just like they misunderstand it today. And Jesus said but I tell you do not resist an evil person. In other words Jesus says sometimes it takes more strength to absorb an injury rather than retaliate.

[37 : 30] To forbear rather than fight back and to overcome evil by doing good. And of course that's what Jesus Christ did when he willingly allowed himself to be nailed to the cross.

His life for ours. Fourth lost, stolen, or damaged property. This is chapter 22 verses 1 to 15.

Again I'm not going to go through each section and each part in detail but I want to point out two themes. Number one the importance of restitution. When property is lost or stolen or damaged and when someone's responsible either by their action or by their negligence restitution is what's required in order to make things right.

What does that mean? If you stole something you bring back what you stole plus some more. If you lose or break something that someone entrusted to you or that belongs to someone else or that you borrowed you buy them another one even if you didn't mean to lose it or break it.

Or if something happens that's genuinely out of your control someone entrusts someone says I'm leaving for the summer can you hold on to this box and a robber comes into your house and you had no control over it and they take the box and run and it's never found.

[38 : 57] Then you make an oath before God and say I did all that I could and something happened that was completely out of my control and then that's all you need to do.

You don't have to pay them back because something happened that was completely beyond your control. So the importance of restitution and in the New Testament we see somebody who understood this principle and it's Zacchaeus.

What did Zacchaeus say? He said if I've defrauded anyone I'll pay them back four times over. You know Zacchaeus didn't just say Jesus I've done a ton of bad things in my life.

I've hurt a lot of people. I've sort of swindled some people and taken some things I shouldn't have taken. Will you just forgive me so that I can forget about it all and not have to deal with any of those things I've done before?

No. Zacchaeus said in effect Jesus I know I've done wrong but I can see that you've accepted me despite my sins and so now I want to do whatever I can to make things right with anyone I've wronged.

[40 : 20] And Jesus says to Zacchaeus when he hears this he says salvation has come to this house. You too are a son of Abraham. In other words that's what it means to be saved.

To know that Jesus has accepted you despite your sin and therefore if you've wronged anybody else you're going to do whatever you can to make things right with them.

You're not just going to forget about it and pretend it never happened. You're not going to leave relationships unreconciled as far as it's in your power.

you're going to come to Jesus and say I know I'm a sinner. You've accepted me by your amazing grace and so I want to do what I can to make things right with others. That's what a Christian does.

That's a distinctive Christian witness in this world because you know what in this world most people don't like to pay restitution or pursue reconciliation. Even in the justice system you can pursue restitution.

[41 : 23] It's in the legal code but what's the more common penalty a restraining order or incarceration? The Bible never promotes incarceration for stealing or even assault but it does say you have to pay the person back and more.

Or in the case of assault that hurt somebody you pay their medical expenses and you pay them for loss of time. and it's a way of seeking to right relationships between people in the covenant family of God.

And so as Christians we need to do that regardless of what the world may do or not do. Regardless of what the justice system may or may not do. As Christians we need to take responsibility to make things right and pursue reconciliation with anybody we've wronged.

Second point about the property laws is that people are always more important than things.

In Hammurabi's law code a thief who couldn't pay back what he stole should be killed. He should receive the death penalty. And robbery or burglary was also deserving of the death penalty.

[42 : 41] The Assyrian laws and the Hittite laws required restitution on the order of 10 to 30 times what was stolen. Of course it depended who you stole from. If you steal from someone of equal or higher status you have to pay them back more.

If you steal from someone of lower status you have to pay just a little tiny bit. In Israel restitution was much more reasonable and doable.

It was normally double sometimes up to four or five times. And property crimes are never punished by the death penalty in Israel because among God's people people are always more important than things.

One specific example chapter 22 verse 2 if a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies there shall be no blood guilt for him but if the sun has risen on him there shall be blood guilt for him.

What does that mean? If somebody breaks into your house at night you can't really see what's going on you kill him that's self-defense because you don't know what the thief is trying to do and he might be trying to kill you and self-defense is allowed in the law.

[43 : 56] But if it's daytime you can see that the thief is not trying to kill you he's only trying to take your stuff. If you kill him you are guilty of murder or manslaughter depending on how that's judged.

But still you're guilty. Even though the thief was obviously committing a crime. You see God's law even protects the dignity of criminals.

Criminals too are created in the image of God and God's law protected them. Last section chapter 22 verse 16 and 17 if a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her he shall give the bride price for her and make her his wife.

If her father utterly refuses to give her to him he shall pay money equal to the bride price for virgins. Alright? This is about premarital sex. It's not about rape.

This is a situation where the man initiates but the woman consents. Deuteronomy has a law about rape. And if a man finds a woman in the open country and she screams for help and nobody can hear her and he violates her he deserves a death penalty.

[45 : 17] That was the law. If she was around other people then she could have called for help. And it's not the death penalty. It's a different... It is a penalty but it's different.

Anyway, we're not talking about rape here. The consequence is... But the situation is a man initiates and he and the woman sleep together.

Neither of them are already married. Neither of them are already betrothed. That is in a binding covenant that they would be married. Consequence, man must give the bride price for her and make her his wife.

You think, what does that mean? Okay, in the ancient Near East if a man wants to marry a woman he would normally give a substantial sum of money to the bride's family. Although sometimes it was even given to the bride herself.

In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant gave silver and gold jewelry and clothing to Rebecca who was to marry Isaac and he also gave gifts costly ornaments to her brother and her mother.

[46 : 17] What was this? It was a way of acknowledging the seriousness and costliness of the marriage covenant. It was a man's way of saying, I am not doing this lightly or I'm willing to put a lot of things on the line.

And usually the bride or her family would save or invest the bride price. You could also call it the wedding present. It was kept as a kind of insurance policy for the bride just in case her husband died unexpectedly or in case her husband abandoned her.

And she had no other way to provide for herself. It was a safety net. It was actually something that protected the woman. The problem here is the man sleeps with the woman without making any promise to her and without going through any preparation for marriage.

And by doing this he puts the woman at great risk. For one thing she might be pregnant or if he abandons her another guy might refuse to marry her because she's no longer a virgin.

Again in that Now of course the fact that this law was on the books would make any single guy in Israel think twice before asking any single girl in Israel to go to bed with him.

[47 : 52] Right? Because he would know that among the people of God sex is not cheap and it's not casual. Two applications for Christians today.

Number one, don't have sex before marriage. According to God's design, sex is like superglue. It's meant to seal the deal on a covenant of marriage and is meant to build on that bond for the rest of your life.

Second, some of you are married now but you started having sex with each other before you got married. Now, ironically, if you're a Christian, having sex before marriage often makes it harder for you to enjoy sex after marriage because you have residual guilt and shame tied up with having sex before marriage when you knew that it was wrong.

But if that's you, and if you have confessed to God your premarital sin and mourned over that before the Lord, that guilt and shame can be removed.

It doesn't have to hang over your bed and your marriage forever. You can go forward with the blessing of your heavenly father and because Christ is making all things new, you can enjoy God's gift of sex in marriage like Adam and Eve who are naked without shame.

[49 : 32] We've gone all over the place today because there's no area of our lives as God's holy people that God does not care about. And yet there's no area of our life that is so broken or so damaged or so twisted that God cannot begin a process of healing and restoration and making things right.

God can meet us right where we are and help us take the next steps forward to where he wants us to go. And we can have this confidence because we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who has come to meet us where we are, who has taken our sin upon himself, and who has promised never to leave us and never to forsake us.

that's what we're going to celebrate as we come to the Lord's Supper today. Let's pray. Father, we