



Sermon Notes | I Will Surely Hear Their Cry (Part II) | Exodus 22:16-23:9

We continue to look at the Law, case studies concerning 'Social Justice,' or 'horizontal justice'; many terms, but all falling under the umbrella of 'Social Responsibility'. Last week we considered the meaning of the term 'Social Justice,' and found it to be a 'loaded' expression. We hear the many words associated with 'social justice', equality, oppression, for example, but to what end? Defined by who? By whose standard? And what standard is in view? But our definition comes from God's Word. For clarity of definition we go to the Creator Himself for our definition.

We will briefly recap the points covered last week:

I. JUSTICE FOR THE MAIDEN (vv. 16-17)

Exodus 22:16-17

"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."

The maiden, a young virgin, of marriageable age, but who is not yet betrothed (strongly engaged), has been taken advantage of. A man has 'seduced' her, lying with her, before she is married, before she has been betrothed or pledged. The injustice has been identified. Today's modern approach would spawn movements, intense responses, but the maiden is still there when the movements burst and fizzle out, leaving her to be forgotten. This is not the way with God. God cares for the 'long term' justice for the maiden. God's standard ensures that the maiden will be protected long term. Whether she be married rightly to a husband, or whether she returns back with her father with a bride price paid, God is concerned with caring for the maiden long term, long after her cries are heard. This is justice after the transgression.

II. JUSTICE FOR THE WICKED (vv. 18-20)

Exodus 22:18-20

"You shall not permit a sorceress to live. Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death. Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction."

The wicked, those with vile behaviour: sorcery, bestiality, idolatry. All three of these things are utterly wicked, and warrant death, all coming under the penalty of capital punishment by God's standard. But in our lost wicked age, these things are not just out

there, but we have been growing more and more comfortable with these dark things, have even embraced them, tolerating them, so that they have even slipped into the church. The low level embracing of superstitions, lucky charms, fortunes, special clothes (such as that lucky tie), the amusement of mediums, and all such insidious forms, the tolerating of all forms of evil has just become common. Yet this is failing to identify ideology, and it is bowing and clinging to our own particular idols. But let this not be us, church!

1 Thessalonians 5:22

"Abstain from every form of evil."

Under God's Law we are to 'abstain' from such things: stay away from, hold back from, refuse, resist, flee from. The mere thought of them should sober us, for justice for wickedness is death.

III. JUSTICE FOR THE 'VERY CLEARLY' SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED (vv. 21-24)

Exodus 22: 21-24

"You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless."

The sojourner, in the land, but not a native of the land, not belonging, as such. The widow, no longer having a husband, and lacking provision and protection. The fatherless, the orphan, having no parents, also now lacking in provision and protection. So why is this important? It is important because 'Social Justice' today has lots to say about 'the disadvantaged,' so much so that it is difficult to keep track of the 'so called' disadvantaged groups. There are no reins, no definitions, and everyone has stripes, so it is hard to keep straight the endless groups. We too are even disadvantaged, because we are sinners. But when the 'disadvantaged' are spoken of by God in the Bible, who they are is made very clear, and so is how to treat them. The sojourner is to be loved, not oppressed.

Leviticus 19:33-34

"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

God has spoken: You shall not wrong him. You shall love him, treat him as one who belongs, treat him as you would want to be treated. You are to remember that you yourselves were once sojourners in the land of Egypt, and when you cried out, I heard your cries and freed you. I saw your 'unjust' life so I moved, and the wrong was made right.

Our God makes right the wrongs. He does not make new wrongs by His decisions. But He also makes clear, there is to be no preferential treatment because of generational wrongs, no partiality. Wrong is not to happen again. God does not wish for more wrongs to

develop. He is not a God of lip service and press conferences. He is a God of Justice! Justice for the wrongdoer, and justice for the disadvantaged, justice for the widow and orphan. Do not mistreat them, for if they cry out, I will hear their cries.

Is God in this? Yes, He surely hears their cries! He has defined the situation, and He carries out His Word. This is True Justice! Praise be to God. He will right the wrongs. This is how God defines justice.

We move on to consider 'Justice for the Poor' today:

IV. JUSTICE FOR THE POOR (vv. 25-27)

Exodus 22:25-27

"If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbour's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."

Poverty is the epicentre, the front and centre of today's 'Social Justice', but we need to know what poverty is from God's point of view, so we will stop and look at poverty more closely. May we receive His view rightly, and may we understand it, and live it out to His glory. Amen

Justice for the poor, under the definition of the Law, is greater than money. By definition, a poor man needs money. Some modern justice cries can help us here. God alludes to 'My people' when addressing the topic, His people, who are struggling with poverty. Yet we tend to live our lives as though there was no poverty, no poor around us. We pretend. We fail to see, even though poverty is all around us, even though it is so visible, and it is increasing here in Peterborough: shelters, law enforcement, fighting crime, hunger. To many it is an inconvenience to have to deal with it, but it has reached crisis proportions today. So what does the church do about this? 'Social Justice' approaches this by focusing effort, but their approach is the wrong solution. The text speaks to 'lending money to my people,' thus we are not speaking about all the poor people. We are addressing 'His people,' brothers in the faith. So what does Scripture say about this poverty, and poverty in general?

Leviticus 25:35-38

"If your brother become poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God."

Deuteronomy 15:10

"You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake."

'Social Justice' looks at this key verse and thinks, 'Look at all that interest that can be made'. But we must look at this in context. This is speaking of those who are poor, who are 'your brother'. Give generously, without begrudging, and without interest.

Deuteronomy 15:7-9, 11

"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and your say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin... For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'"

Deuteronomy 23:19-20

"You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest, You may charge a foreigner interest, but you may not charge your brother interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land that you are entering to take possession of it."

Scripture distinguishes between 'brother' and 'everyone else'. Not everyone is a 'brother'. Jesus pointed out, some people are sheep, others are goats.

Matthew 25: 31-40

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

Do not neglect the poor in the Body of Christ. These are His people. These are the redeemed. The righteous ask for clarification about these final judgment days. 'When were all these things done? 'They were done to Me,' Jesus tells them. 'What is done to the Body

of Christ is done to Me.' Failing in the household of God, in the household of faith, is no small thing. The first focus we are to have is to God's people.

Galatians 6:10

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

'Social Justice' says, 'Serve them! Do this above all else'. But Scripture teaches, 'priority not neglect'. The 'Social Justice' way is like the father who cares for all the children of the neighbourhood, but neglects his own. 'Social Justice' says, 'do this' or you are not a good Christian. While the gesture is well intended, it does not solve the problem, it only creates new problems. You are not a good Christian if those needs matter more than caring for 'the brothers,' if you focus on those needs more than the needs of the body of Christ. Initially it sounds good, for it is sprinkled with Biblical intentions, but the verses are taken out of context.

Of late we witness such, under the guise of 'feeling good,' doing what is best for the people. 'Close the church for the health of the people,' we are told, but this does not help the church; this causes the loss of 'feeding the sheep'. This causes the sheep to fall, to suffer. Such an action esteems the needs of the world over the needs of the church. This is modern 'Social Justice' perversions affecting the church. This is buying into non-Biblical approaches at the expense of the sheep. God is clear, as Christians we are not to harden our hearts or shut our hands, but are to be generous towards our brother. The Deuteronomy 15 and 25 passages, the Matthew 25 and Galatians 6 passages make this clear, but this is separate from the feeding of our minds and souls. Not being fed, not being nourished from God's Word is not of benefit. Giving up Christ to save the world, abandoning God's Word, its message, turns the definition of 'social justice' upside down, and you gain nothing. And while the focus is to share generously with 'the brethren,' in truth, God does not neglect the 'other poor'. He desires that we love our neighbours as ourselves. It is not a matter of giving them money. Give them food. Give them practical things. Give them consideration. Do not ignore them. Family needs are to be cared for.

Leviticus 19:9-10

"When you reap the harvest of your land you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner; I am the LORD your God."

But there are other needs to be considered also. Food and clothing only address some needs, the temporal, the sustainability. Spiritual needs are also vital. Does the work of mercy also point them to God? Reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ is the greater need. Addressing the eternal separation from God, and forever in hell, is a greater need than food and clothing. Jesus instructs the importance of this clearly:

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Additionally, the 'Social Justice' approach will lend a hand to the needy, but with interest charged, so that they get something back. This is the economy of the world – lending, but taking back more. Yes, we must function in the world's economy, but in God's economy, collecting interest from God's people is not the way to go. Lend, yes. But forget interest. Expect nothing in return. Just give it to them. 'Gift' to the brother in need.

Leviticus 25:36

"If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you."

This approach fits with Jesus' teaching in the New Covenant.

Luke 6:35-36

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

This is an expansion of God's Law. This is Christ on display, demonstrating the character of the Triune Law, goodness flowing out from the Law. God gives undeserved gifts to us and expects no payback; and so we are to do likewise, following His model. Be generous to the poor and needy, expecting no pay back.

Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Ephesians 2:4-10

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

There is no interest on salvation, no pay back. It is a free gift. This is the character of God in the Law. He is compassionate. There is no interest, but you may take a pledge. 'A cloak' pledged is to be returned. It is 'symbolic', a gesture between brothers.

Exodus 22:26-27

"If ever you take your neighbour's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."

Deuteronomy 24:10-13

"When you make your neighbour a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God."

God protects the rights of the vulnerable, and those who disregard this law will be judged. God holds His own to higher standards.

Amos 2:4, 8

"For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked ... they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined."

Job 22:6

"For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing."

Middle and upper class lenders could keep the 'pledged cloak' until it could be returned, but the poor had few, perhaps only the one cloak, and needed their cloak for warmth. The cloak was functional. It may well have been his only covering for sleep. God cares about the needs of this poor soul. This is the heart of God.

But other care, 'the ungodly care', does not speak like this, does not have compassion, justice, and mercy. It is a matter of 'you owe me now, so give it to me'. This is ungodly lending. I will take your cloak, and more still. The world gives, but always demands much in return. And the church, neglecting the needs of households, is a matter of injustice also. But God attends to this also. "...If he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate." He hears, sees and establishes fair and merciful justice. His perfect justice, a kiss of kindness, set forth in love and grace from above. Without God, understanding of 'True Justice' is missing. While there may be good and virtuous intentions, noble presentations, many programs, and millions spent, without God, the intentions fail to meet their precise mark, the plans are costly and bankrupt, and incapable of true success.

Without Christ, we are all poor, are and have nothing, and are in big trouble, but in Him, we have everything. He becomes our cloak and pledge.