

The Weekly Word
November 9-15, 2020

Deuteronomy steams towards its conclusion. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, November 9: Deuteronomy 20– Stepping out in faith...

One very difficult aspect of faith to learn is that when God asks or commands you to do something God will supply what you need to get it done. Israel needed to learn this. The first step in learning was having Moses stand before the people and tell them it is so. *When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you* (1). Now the truth is that they won't truly master this truth until they stand before a greater enemy and trust in the Lord for victory.

My mind flashes to Gideon in Judges 6 (check it out if you don't know the story).

The thing is we all need to learn this lesson. And then most of us need to learn and re-learn and re-learn it again and again throughout life. I know I do.

Obviously the first facet to master is knowing God is calling you to do something. The promise of God's presence and God's success is doing God's will, not simply doing something we want to do or even something we believe might be good in God's eyes.

When God calls, God provides... so be sure God called.

Next step is to actually trust and step out in faith. Gideon had to gather the army, then after God whittled the army down to 300 men Gideon had to actually go into battle.

The same goes for us. If God calls us to step out in some way then we need to step out. We have to take the risk and enter the game. We will never see the provision of God if we remain in the stands or even on the bench. God's provision comes when we enter the field of play.

The Lord God is calling Israel to take the Promised Land. They will have to raise their swords in battle to receive God's promise.

We have to step out in faith if we want to receive God's promise... Now I need to bow my head and ask the Lord if He is leading me to do something I feel is against the odds and if so... I need to step out in faith.

Lord, give me all the faith I need to do everything You call me to do. I pray this in the name of my Savior Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday, November 10: Deuteronomy 21– A tough chapter...

Aside from the first paragraph, this is a difficult chapter for me to digest. The way of life is so different in Old Testament times. Marriage seems quite different from one man and one woman until death separates.

The ruling about the captive woman becoming one's wife almost sounds as if it is inevitable that she would be granted a divorce. I realize the word divorce isn't mentioned, but God does say, *If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her* (14).

Then I wonder, why not mention that as a foreign woman she might influence the husband to follow her gods? It doesn't feel like marriage is honored as highly as it ought.

In the next paragraph, the word about the place of the first-born, the injunction speaks to the situation of a man having two wives. It feels like this is a commonplace occurrence. What about fidelity of one man and one woman until death separates?

I don't honestly know what to make of all of this...

I know the New Testament affirms the one man, one woman for life as the definition of marriage. I am certainly glad I live under the clarity of the New Testament.

Today I will rest in the assurance of my salvation that Jesus provides.

Lord, I thank You for the clarity of the New Testament and the gift of Jesus, in Whose name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, November 11: Deuteronomy 22– Am I a good neighbor?...

I wonder why Moses reminded Israel about the laws of returning lost oxen or other animals to their rightful owner, without mentioning the overarching law that they helped explain when they were first given in Leviticus 19:18: Why did God codify these in the first place? Was Israel engaged in a grand game of 'finders keepers' when it came to lost animals?

If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to its owner. If they do not live near you or if you do not know who owns it, take it home with you and keep it until they come looking for it. Then give it back. Do the same if you find their donkey or cloak or anything else they have lost. Do not ignore it.

If you see your fellow Israelite's donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help the owner get it to its feet (1-4).

In Leviticus 19:18b God gave the broad principle *-love your neighbor as yourself...* - of which these laws are a subset. I wonder why Moses chose not to reiterate the broader statement?

After wondering for a while I realized that my wondering about the historical context allowed me not to consider what implications, if any, these laws could have with my life.

Am I a good neighbor for my neighbors? Am I helpful and caring? Would I go out of my way to serve them in a time of need?

I am reminded of the Bible's command to 'love my neighbor as myself'. Do I live that way?

Lord, show me where I need to up my game as a neighbor... lead me, Lord, to be a growing disciple of Yours. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, November 12: Deuteronomy 23– Small acts of helping...

The 8th commandment says, "thou shall not steal." (see Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5) and yet today Moses declares, *If you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain (24-25).*

Is there a principle at play in these verses? Food taken so one can eat is not stealing in the eyes of God?

One interesting element is that both the commandment and this addendum, if you will, are the word of God. So, how do I navigate this? And, equally important, what does this tell me about the Lord who gives us His word?

As I move to these subsequent questions. It seems that God is reminding me (us) that care for one another is a high priority for the Lord. In the ancient world where people are very busy simply putting food on their own tables, I don't suspect many people would be merely wandering

in a neighbor's field. A more likely scenario is that they are traveling from town to town or had some kind of a meeting they were going to or returning from. Thus while they are journeying and they are hungry to grab some food, while on their journey, was not breaking the 8th commandment. This leads to my thought that God bids us to care for one another. After all there weren't 7 Elevens on every corner in ancient days.

The Deuteronomy text is akin to the prohibitions about gleaning one's field (see Deuteronomy 24:21 and Leviticus 19:10) but that prohibition was expressly so that the poor could find food, where as today's text is about a friend with no mention of poverty.

More to the point of my devotions today, what does this say to me today in the 21st century? My answer, I guess I should be to not begrudge a neighbor if they need a little something from me. A cluster of grapes or a handful of grain will not be missed at the end of the year when I consider my harvest. A neighbor needing a helping hand one afternoon or a cup of sugar or a hand shoveling her driveway could be a great help for the neighbor in the moment, but would hardly be felt by me a month or year later. My small gift is a large blessing to the neighbor.

At our church we have a food pantry for families in the church who need help. Buying extra pasta sauce or something else for the food pantry will not substantially change my food budget for the year but may in fact provide help to get a family in my church through a tough time.

Lord, open my heart wider to help friends, neighbors and people in need. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friday, November 13: Deuteronomy 24– Helping others while preserving dignity...

In setting up the nation of Israel, the Lord put in place safeguards for people who found themselves in debt to a fellow Israelite. These safeguards reveal to me yet another way the Lord cares for those who are poor or who find themselves on hard times.

Do not take a pair of millstones—not even the upper one—as security for a debt, because that would be taking a person's livelihood as security. ...

When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God (6, 10-13).

Verse 6, about not taking the millstones makes so much sense. Why take in pledge what a person needs in order to live? Vengeance, a mean spirit, spite or because you can come to mind as potential reasons and each one is devoid of any heart for the person in debt. Said positively, God is modeling graciousness toward people in need.

Verses 10-11, not going inside a person's house to collect their pledge offers dignity to the person needing the loan. If you need a loan, you probably don't have much. How does it feel when a well off person comes into your meager space? Embarrassing? Disheartening? By remaining outside you offer dignity to the person in need. Also, maybe you negotiated a cloak or rug as pledge, going inside you might see something else you would rather hold in pledge. There might be a temptation to renegotiate. Again, dignity is preserved.

Next God through Moses makes the point that returning a cloak given in pledge before nightfall (and before they could have possibly repaid the loan) is done so that the poor person might sleep. Cloaks doubled as blankets. Again, the clear teaching shows care for the brother or

sister in need outweighs the loan given. The poor person still owes you what they owe you, but by returning the pledged item you are showing care for them as a fellow human being.

Life remains unfair. Some people fall into dire situations and people on the top are to display dignity and care for people in need as they help.

It is not enough to help people in need, the manner in which we do this... offering dignity and care as we help is equally important.

When I give to humanitarian organizations and missions I need to ask questions about how they treat recipients and not simply how much they give... This is one take away I have from today.

Lord, create in me a gracious 'open hearted' giver... In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, November 14: Deuteronomy 25– Fair treatment...

Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain (4). What an interesting verse.

My knowledge is not exhaustive, but this is one of a few, if any, verses in the Old Testament that prescribes fair and kind treatment to animals. The picture is clear, let an oxen eat some of the grain that he is marching on to separate the grain from the husks.

During my travels in Israel, we came upon some Bedouins while we were hiking in the Negev. In their small encampment there was a pole stuck into the ground. A line attached to the pole attached to an ox who walked in circles. The Bedouin would throw grain on the well-worn path of the ox circling round and round. The ox was treading the grain. God says let oxen eat as they tread grain.

God apparently has a heart for creatures as well as humans.

In the New Testament Paul employs this verse twice (1Corinthians 9:9, 1Timothy 5:18) to teach for adequate payment for teachers in the church.

God delights in fairness. God anticipates that our hearts, mirroring his heart, will be generous and caring for creation that serves us as well as people who serve us.

I wonder if this verse has significance for society as it treats and pays for people who serve us... This thought push this passage to places I have never considered before.

I need to give this much greater thought...

Lord, I pray for wisdom in this area. Are You pushing me to consider new places in my life where I need to make reforms in my thinking and living? The wonder and hard work of living under the authority of Your Word. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, November 15, 2020 - Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.