

The Joy of Resting in the Lord of the Sabbath, Part 2 Deuteronomy 15:1-16:20

Intro:

- **Illst:** Paying off the church's rental houses (it feels good to be out of debt)
- This morning's message is about getting out of debt

Last Sunday we looked at **Deuteronomy 14:22-29** and we learned the fourth command taught that the Sabbath was a day of rest for God's people, the fourth commandment also taught that the tithe is the Sabbath for our money, wealth and possessions.

We also learned the Jesus was the embodiment of the Sabbath as the Lord of the Sabbath. He fulfilled the Sabbath. Jesus, by fulfilling the Sabbath drilled the spirit of the Sabbath deeper into our hearts than Sabbath Law written on stone.

It does not release us from the Lord's Day, a day of rest or from tithing but instead birthed in our hearts real desire rest, remember, rejoice, be refreshed and recommit ourselves to Him in worship and to commit all of our money, wealth and possessions to Him.

We are going to pick up in **Deuteronomy 15** this morning and go through **Deuteronomy 16:20**. As we examine the fourth commandment we are to see how the Sabbath was designed to help God's people who were commanded to overflow in mercy, grace and generous justice for the poor and embody what it means to release debt. **Main Point: Jesus creates the Sabbath-Heart that overflows with the riches of grace and an abundance of mercy, which means we are quick to forgive debts and overflow with generosity toward others.**

We will mainly be in **Deuteronomy 15:1-18**. We will work through these verses and make some application along the way but I will make the main application at the end and by bringing in **Deuteronomy 15:19-16:20** into the New Covenant for the application.¹

I. God intends for His people to release debts and debtors with overflowing grace and mountains of mercy (Deuteronomy 15:1-18) [read text]

We have seen some strong commands and hard words in Deuteronomy but when we get to **Deuteronomy 15** and how the Sabbath addresses release of debts, debt-slaves and helping the poor we begin to taste the mercy and grace that Yahweh actually wants His people to know. (Work through the text)

A. Shemittah Rule: Set the Debtors Free (Deuteronomy 15:1-2)

- In **vv. 1-2** is what Israel called the *Shemittah Rule/Law*. This Law governed how Yahweh expected Israel to deal with debts and debtors within the covenant community.
- **Why did they do it?** *Yahweh's release had been proclaimed (v. 2c)* They may have created the mess but Yahweh delivered them. It was a small picture of salvation from Egyptian slavery. So it pointed back to Yahweh's deliverance. It was a reminder that they had been delivered and they were to proclaim that deliverance by passing it along to others in the covenant community.
- **Release** = *Let it drop, Let it do, let it lay in furlough. They were to release the burden of debt slavery off of their brother's back in the seventh year (drop the rock).* No questions asked just release the slave. They didn't earn it or deserve it.
- **The first two verses also** lay out where Moses was going in his sermon . . .

B. The exception to the rule (Deuteronomy 15:3)

- **Verse 3** gives the exception to the Shemittah Law by saying that you can expect a foreigner or someone who is not in the covenant community to repay their debt. If you are not in the covenant community of faith you will have to pay your own debt.

¹ The reason I am not going to cover Deut. 15:19-16:20 in verse-by-verse exposition is that they have been covered in other sermons. They were covered in great detail when we worked through Leviticus so I want to give more attention to Deut. 15:1-18 and let the remainder of the text help us with the application.

- **Not to spiritualize this but isn't this the way it works with our sin?** If we are in the family of God, then Jesus has paid the debt but if we are not then we are responsible for paying our debt of sin.

C. Generosity as the path to riches in Christ (Deuteronomy 15:4-6)

- **Verse 4: "But there will be no poor among you . . ."** There seems to be a contradiction as we read the whole passage. However, what we find is that this passage teaches what is **ideal** and what is **reality**. We will notice as we work through the text the progression of the idea of the poor among us.
- We strive for Yahweh's ideal in v. 4 but because the world is broken by sin we need vv. 7 & 11 to teaches us how to live redemptively in this world. Why will there be no poor among the people of God because vv. 7 & 11 are going to help them circle back to make sure there are not any. Yet Israel did not fulfill their calling. **Verse 4** is only fulfill in the coming of Christ and ultimately in when Jesus returns there will certainly be no more spiritually poor among us because Christ would have fulfilled all.

D. The body language of helping the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

- **Verse 7 brings the ideal society in to perspective.** The reality is our world is broken by sin so now it says, "*If among you, one of your brothers should become poor.*"
- **Why would this brother become poor?** We live in world broken by sin and we may come through all kinds of dangers, toils, snares but we will make just plain stupid mistakes. *So why will a brother become poor?*
 - Sin brought death and so a husband sometimes died young and left his family unable to repay their debts or unable to carve out a living. Such was the case with Naomi and Ruth.
 - Also famines hit and that can caused poverty. This was also Naomi's experience. It was a drought that caused the family to leave the covenant land and search for greener pastures in Moab.
 - People face economic hardships, a down turn in the economy, stock markets crash and enemies invade, and all of these can cause poverty.
 - People are sinners and sometimes a child squanders his inheritance like the prodigal son did in Jesus' parable.
 - In the desire to become rich, a person may make bad investments with his money.
 - Also the world is filled with sinners who take advantage of others and cause them to be poor. The wealthy have often exploited the poor.
 - People become poor for various reasons but it all comes from the fact that the world is broken by sin.
- **Verse 11: Shows us the reality: "For there will never cease to be poor in the land."**
 - **Not to chase a rabbit here but we cannot help but hear Jesus' words in Matthew, Mark and Luke and the story when the woman anointed his head with a flask of very expensive nard.** After she had anointed him, His disciples were indignant and said that this money could have been sold and given to the poor but he told them that she had done a beautiful thing for him and that they *would have the poor with them always*.

Jesus point was not that the poor are no big deal because they were always here. You have to examine the situation. This woman was poor and she gave all she had to bless her Savior. The point is that we are to live extravagantly for Christ even if we are poor we are to give of all we have to our Savior. We are to take care of the poor and we are to remember that by doing so it is like doing it to the Lord or serving Christ Himself. We are to overflow with grace and mercy.

- **Verses 7-11: Ought to cause us to ask the questions: What is our posture toward poverty? What is our body language toward the poor?**
- These verses teach us that we must open wide our **hands**, our **hearts** and our **eyes** to the needy.
- **Verses 7-11 take the command in vv. 1-2 and drive it into the heart.** We might say that from out of the overflow of the heart and the eye perceives others and the hand is open or closed to those we need to help.
- There is **negative** and **positive** language about our posture toward poverty in these verses. The negative and positive language helps us evaluate our hearts.
 - Listen to the interplay of the language in these verses (*work through the verses and then ask questions of ourselves.*)
 - **What is your first reaction when you see a needy person coming?**
 - “*Oh no not again!*” We can sometimes get weary helping those who seem to live in a cycle of poverty.
 - Do you ever fight the urge to dread seeing someone or helping a continually needy person?
 - Do you ever feel your heart getting hard toward them?
 - **We do not live the theocratic, agrarian society that Israel did.** Our government actually takes on the responsibility to help those in need but in reality it is not the government’s job to do this. It is ours. We should not depend on the government to do our job as Christians.
 - Our government, in its desire to do social justice (helping the poor) actually creates more problems than it solves. It can keep people in a cycle of dependence where the church’s gospel-community helps people to identify sinful habits and patterns that might be keeping them in poverty because they are following Christ. The church is far more effective in helping the poor than the government (and the church does not always do a great job but it is far superior).
 - **When it comes to helping the poor, one church cannot do it all but we must make a difference with whatever we have been given.** We find ways to serve with our food pantry, benevolence offering, we partner with other churches in our city, through our state convention and the SBC.
 - **We want the Sabbath-Heart toward the poor but we must also be wise when we help the poor.** If you want to grow in how we help the poor in our society and culture there is a good book called: *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. Excellent read for helping the poor in our modern culture and society and world for that matter. Lots of mission organizations use this book to train their missionaries and we have used it here to help us get organized as a church.

E. Freely it has been given to you so feely you shall supply (Deuteronomy 15:12-18)

- When it comes to these verses we can see that we certainly do not live in the same kind of society ancient Israel did. We understand what debt is and we know what slavery is but we do not practice debt-slavery. It might sound like bartering but it is not the same as bartering either.
- **So what is the take away from these verses?** Again it is the opportunity to be generous and met the need with overflowing grace and mercy. Listen to the language:
 - *On the Sabbath year, the seventh year, for the debt-slave they were to . . .*
 - **Verse 12:** *Let him go free*
 - **Verse 13:** *Let him go free but not empty-handed*

- **Verse 14a:** *"You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him."*
- **Verse 14b: First Motivation: They have been blessed by Yahweh.** *Yahweh didn't bless His people because they were good; He blessed them because He was good.* We might say their blessing was grounded in election. He didn't choose them because they were good but because He loved them and now they were to be a blessing to others.
- **Verse 15: Second Motivation is grounded in redemption.**
 - They were blessed because they had been redeemed from slavery in Egypt. They were to remember God had been gracious and merciful to them and now they, out of this salvation, were to overflow on to others.
 - Think about it, the debt-slave that had been released was to not leave with a zero balance on the debt register but instead was leaving with their coffers full because the one they owed had liberally supplied them out of grace and mercy toward them. They didn't even finish paying their debt; they were being released because it was the Sabbath year. They may have owed more than six years debt but the Sabbath year meant release, grace and mercy overflowing.
- **The take away is that compassion, mercy and grace must be given and given from the heart.** From our hearts (the control-center of our lives) find ways to be a blessing to others by overflowing with generosity in love, service, money, wealth, possession, time, talent and possessions.
- **Our motivation is the same motivation as ancient Israel except we must bring it into the New Covenant.** It is because as Christians we have been given the riches of Christ. Our hope is not set on earthly riches but on the riches of Christ that has been poured out into our hearts.
 - **1 Timothy 6:17-18,** *"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."¹⁸ They are to do good, **to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,**¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."*
 - Those who understand they have been given the riches of Christ begin to overflow by opening their hands, hearts and pocketbooks of their earthly riches toward the poor or those in need for they know that God has been gracious to them. Being born again changes the heart, the hand and the eye toward those in need.
 - I am not saying if you loan money you should not expect repayment and on the seventh year you release it. We do not live in the same kind of society but if you can give it . . . then give it. Be wise and learn how to help those in need.
 - **Transition:** Which brings us to the final application.

II. Application: Jesus on Releasing Debt

When we get to the New Testament, Jesus takes the **Deuteronomy 15** teaching on releasing debt and slave-debtors beyond money and wealth and applies it to what it means to be forgiven and what it means to truly forgive who sins against us.

- **Model Prayer: Matthew 6:12, 14-15,** ¹²*and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors . . .*¹⁴*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,*¹⁵*but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*
 - You hear the language of **Deuteronomy 15** in this passage.
- **Matthew 18:21-35 is where I want us to spend our time as we make application and conclude our time this morning.**

- Read the passage.
- The ability and the motivation to forgive and show mercy is because mercy has been received. The mercy displayed by the king in forgiving an enormous debt ought to have created in the servant's hearts a grateful response that caused him to correspond in forgiveness of a trivial debt owed to him.
- **This parable ends with Jesus giving a command and an indictment in v. 35.** Professor Christopher Wright, in his book *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, said on this point: "So Jesus portrays the sticky end of the unmerciful debtor to make the point that mutual forgiveness is not a nice thing for the soft-hearted, but an essential mandate of the King on those who submit to the reign of God."²
- We must forgive and I believe Deuteronomy 15 has something to say about our posture toward that forgiveness. Our hand, heart and eye are to let go of the grudge. There will always be offenses in our community of faith so we must learn how to release the debt. (drop the rock again).
- **Illst: John Ensor story, *The Great Work of the Gospel*³**
 - The great work of the gospel is that it changes our hearts and creates a bottomless well of gratitude that flows from the work of Christ. Jesus from the cross forgave those who wrongly convicted Him of sin and had Him crucified.
 - If we are really converted then we will fight to forgive, we will fight grudges that try to root themselves in our hearts. Stubborn grudges must be met with gospel-saturated prayers grounded in the work of Christ until we obtain the grace to forgive those who sin against us.
 - John Ensor, "*Grudges love to be nursed, not nuked. Given enough time and fertilizer, our grudges will grow so big that they will wrap themselves around our very personality and cover us like ivy covers a house. Grudges force us to play the role of victims, never victors. Holding on to grudges is like crying out for a life preserver while clinging to the anchor! We have to choose either one or the others. 'If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matt. 6:15) Our grip on grudeges must be released. Our very life depends on it.*"⁴

Conclusion:

- **Lord's Supper as the conclusion of the sermon:**
 - **Deuteronomy 15:19-23** – the firstborn is dedicated to Yahweh
 - **Deuteronomy 16:1-20** – the festivals, Passover, Feast of Weeks and Feasts of Booths all point to Christ and are fulfilled in Christ and the importance of justice.
- Doxology

² Christopher Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, p. 198.

³ John Ensor, *The Great Work of the Gospel*, pp. 138-139.

⁴ John Ensor, *The Great Work of the Gospel*, p. 140.