

Law and Order (Part 1)
"Protecting the Innocent"¹
Deuteronomy 19:1-21

Intro:

- **The importance of finding the glory of God in these texts.** Illst: Man finds treasure in a field . . . digs it up
- **In Deuteronomy 19, Moses begins his exposition of the sixth commandment.** The sixth commandment in **Deuteronomy 5:17** says, "*You shall not murder.*" It is usually thought of as the prohibition for one premeditated murder in the form of revenge or assassination. In **Deuteronomy 19:1-22:12**, Moses was expanding Israel's understanding and application of the sixth commandment. This commandment is bigger than just not murdering but it is about protecting the innocent. It is about the sanctity of human life and this was something unique to the ancient world in which Israel lived. The sanctity of human life was important because it was based in the nature and character of Yahweh.

The world may not think much of the value of a single human life, but in the Law of God the value of a human life is very precious. So when someone murders another person, they are destroying the only thing in creation that is created in the image of God. In the sixth commandment God instituted a law to teach the *sanctity of human life*.

- **Our study on the sixth commandment is a three part series called: Law and Order.** Just so you know, the names in this sermon have been changed to protect the innocent. Actually what we are going to find is that there are truly no innocent people.
- **We also find in Deuteronomy 19 a thread of redemption.** It is a theme that runs through the Bible but it is a little more challenging to find in chapters 19-22.
 - **The main point of the message:** Jesus is the Truly Innocent One who gave up His innocent life so that by faith in Him many may become innocent.
 - **Expanded Main Point:** In other words, Jesus is the only Innocent One and He gave His innocent life to save the guilty by taking our murderous guilt on Himself on the cross so that by faith in Him we may flee to Him and find refuge because He is our inheritance.

I. The innocent need a refuge for protection (Deuteronomy 19:1-13)

A. Read the text

B. Moses is giving a refresher on this particular law.

- a. We first saw it in Deuteronomy in **Deuteronomy 4:41-43 (read)**.
- b. However, the larger explanation of this law is found in **Numbers 35:9-34**.

C. Explain the text:

Verses 1-13: Guard the inheritance by protecting the innocent (work through the text)

- **Verses 1: Introduction to the law,** When you get take possession of the land . . . do this . . .
- **Verses 2-3: The law: Guard the inheritance by protecting the innocent who accidentally shed blood**
- **Verses 4-6: Example of how the law works**
- **Verses 7-10: Purpose of the law:** To guard the inheritance by protecting the innocent who accidentally shed blood

¹ The word "Innocent" or "innocence" is not being used in the spiritual sense in this message but in the judicial sense. That is how it is implied in the text and how I am using it in as it compares to the U. S. laws. In the spiritual sense we are all guilty and this comes out in the message. The way to think of innocence in this message is in the sense of "vulnerable." However, in my mind "vulnerable" did not quite fully communicate what I wanted to say. I hope this short explanation helps.

Summary: The purpose of the cities of refuge was to provide a place and time for due process of the law. The person who accidentally killed another person would be able to flee to the city in his area and be protected from the “avenger of blood”. This allowed the judges and priests time to investigate the crime and see how to respond. If the death was an accident then the city of refuge becomes the manslayer’s home until the death of the high priest. After the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to his inheritance.

I don’t want to call this his prison sentence but it is in some way like his sentence. He accidentally caused a death and he was found to be innocent of murder because he did not kill the person with malice so his punishment is to live in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest is the length of his sentence.

- **Verses 11-13: Judge the guilty because of the innocent blood he shed**

Summary: However, if the man was guilty of murder then justice must be administered. He cannot hide in the city of refuge. He must be brought out. The *avenger of blood* may then carry out the sentence of, what is called, *Lex Talionis* or the *law of retribution* or as v. 21 says, “Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Application:

When we apply vv. 1-13 it is obvious we do not live the kind of society that Israel did. We do not have cities of refuge or the law of retribution where the *avenger of blood* (a member of the family) seeks to carry out justice like a vigilante. Here are some things to help us apply this text.

1. **Justice is imperfect on this side of heaven.** We have a government that passes laws to protect citizens where a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. We have a court system with lawyers to represent citizens in court. We have police and detectives who investigate crimes to try to figure out guilt or innocence. As good as our system is it is very imperfect. We practice what theologians call *rough justice*. Rough justice is imperfect justice carried out imperfectly by sinners.

One of the problems with the limitations of our justice system is that our laws are supposed to protect the innocent but that does not always happen. The innocent are sometimes taken advantage of in our system. For example, the recent rise of clashes between the police and disenfranchised groups in our nation shows the limitation of our justice system. If people feel like the justice system has failed them they will begin to take the law into their own hands. The truth gets muddled and who knows who is telling the truth.

What happens when the police accidentally kill a citizen? There is no city of refuge for them. What happens with corrupt police intentionally kill innocent people because they are racist or just being brutal? What happens when there is a miscarriage of justice on either side of the law? What we are witnessing in our nation are citizens beginning to practice the *law retribution* in order to get justice.

2. **What are we to do as Christians?**

- a. As Christians we must confess that we hate a miscarriage of justice but on this side of heaven rough justice carried out by sinners is all we have until Christ is seated on His throne and He dispenses perfect justice. At this point He will right every miscarriage of justice.
- b. **Until that day come, we must come together as Christians and as the church local and universal to stand for justice and for mercy.** We will never have the solution for all injustices but we have the only hope for justice and that is in Jesus

Christ. We must point people to Him. Jesus understands the miscarriage of justice for it was the miscarriage of justice that got Him nailed to the cross.

- c. **We must pray for our leaders to act with justice, wisdom and righteousness.** Pray for our police by name if you know them. Pray for our community leaders. Pray and work for reconciliation between police and groups who want to take the law into their own hands or even lash out at the police. We must stand for law and order. We must stand for justice. We must speak for peace and working things out according to the rule of law. Our system is not perfect and when it fails we point people to Christ, who is the Ultimate Judge. He will settle all accounts in the end.
 - d. **Find ways to serve and support those who lead.** We must do what we can to serve those who lead and hold them to act honorably as they lead.
 - e. **Show mercy to those who have been wrongly accused or experienced a miscarriage of justice.** Weep with those who weep over lost livelihood and perhaps their future. There are those whose lives have been permanently scarred by a miscarriage of justice and only in heaven will it be made right, if they trust Christ.
3. **One of the greatest miscarriages of justice where the innocent are taken advantage of in our nation is abortion.**
- a. There are two victims with this corrupt law: the young girl who is carrying the baby and the baby.
 - b. There is bloodguilt on our nation. We must pray that this atrocity is stopped.
4. **Find ways to provide refuge for the innocent and vulnerable.**
- a. **We do not have cities of refuge but we can provide refuge through the mercy and compassion given in prolife ministries.** Ministries like Informed Choices give us opportunities to love those who are hurting, show compassion for young men and women.
 - b. **Adoption as a refuge.** Help families adopt those precious babies who have been saved from abortion.
5. **We must confess our sin of omission when it comes to protecting the innocent.**
- a. **For many of us our sin is neglecting to display the heart of God when it comes to the sanctity of human life.** It is hard work and can put us in conflict with much of our culture and so the easiest thing to do is wrap ourselves up in our own pursuits and not get involved.
 - b. **As a church (not just Grand but all churches) we must confess our sin of indifference toward protecting the innocent.** Repent and begin to find ways we can make a difference. Personally we cannot do everything but some of us have gifts in those areas and time to serve. We must pray for our fellow believers who work and serve in those areas. Perhaps we can join them when possible.
 - c. **We need the church to help us continually repent, stay focused and get involved.** We need the encouragement and exhortations of one another to help us stand firm when we lose vision and hope.
6. **Finally when all else fails we must show people that God is still on His throne.** He will settle all accounts. We must let them know that no one escapes the justice of God (The Ultimate Avenger of Blood).

The scary thing is we are all guilty of murder. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5:21-22a**) *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever . . ."*

According to **Deuteronomy 19:11-13, 21**, there is not city of refuge for us and it is an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. We are all under condemnation.

Yet while we were enemies of God and deserving the Ultimate Avenger of Blood to exact justice, God came in Christ and died for our sin. The wrath of retaliation fell on Christ so that God could become our Refuge.

So here is the point, the only way for people to be free from their anger and desire for retribution is to realize that they were just as guilty for it was their sin that killed Jesus and yet God came and showed them mercy in Christ. If they will repent of their sin and trust Christ then they will find the mercy and ability to forgive those who sin against them.

II. The innocent need their inheritance protected (Deuteronomy 19:14)

Verse 14 might seem like a strange verse to us and even out of place in the discussion. How does it fit with the theme of protecting the innocent?

Here is what we need to understand. The land was the inheritance for God's people. To have land given to you was your membership in the covenant community. For someone to come long and move the landmark of your boundary was an encroachment or an attack on your inheritance. It was in effect an attempt to steal your inheritance.

In an agrarian culture, land was how you made your living and provided for your family. To move the boundary marker was to steal another family's livelihood.

Application:

1. The temptation in v. 14 is to think we do not do this. Yet what we realize upon closer inspection is that sin underneath v. 14 is greed and covetousness. No . . . we may not be a Bernie Madoff and develop ponzi scheme to rip people off of their livelihood but we still have the same desire to get all we can at the expense of another. The temptation is there and we must admit it.

This is why families self-destruct when there is a will to be settled after their parents die. Everyone wants their piece of the pie and if they can take a little piece of yours then that is okay too. The truth is we are never more like the enemy than when we choose to steal another's ability to make a living or provide for their family. Jesus says in **John 10:10**, "*The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy.*"

2. The real challenge is found when we ask the question that is under this law: *how do I show love to my neighbor?* This is the real question.

a. Instead of attacking or inhibiting another's ability to live how do we love them and help them provide for their family? How do we help them flourish and thrive? Let's be this kind of people because this is what the gospel does.

i. Let's be people who develop ways to help others thrive in life.

ii. Let's go on mission trips where we teach others skills for living that helps them thrive and flourish.

iii. It is like going to Haiti and teaching Agricultural skills, building school desks, leaving tools behind, and improving living conditions.

b. However, we can teach people all of the skills in the world but if they do not have Jesus it does not matter. The ultimate enjoyment of an inheritance is inheritance of eternal life in Christ. If we are concerned with helping people find Christ then we help them find to enlargement of their inheritance and enlargement of their hearts because Jesus is the best inheritance.

c. 1 Peter 1:3-4: ³*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴*to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you . . ."*

III. The innocent need protection from false witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15-19)

Verses 15-19 deal with guarding the inheritance by protecting the innocent from false and malicious witnesses. We have already covered the process of how a case was to be investigated by the priest and judges and the number of witnesses in **Deuteronomy 16**. **Verses 15-19** are not dealing with the process but with the importance of protecting an innocent person from false charges and lying witnesses. **Verse 19** concludes the discussion by calling the judges to do to the false witnesses what they wanted done to those whom they accused.

Application:

1. **I think tendency for us is to read vv. 15-19 and think of someone else instead of seeing ourselves in these verses.** The truth is we are the ones who struggle to be honest witnesses. We all at some level want to shade the truth in our own favor, spin the story to make ourselves look good or exonerate ourselves. We must come to terms with the fact that this was not written with someone else in mind but us.
2. **We cannot protect the innocent when we are the ones harming the innocent with our lies.** This is hard teaching but it is there for a reason. **Verse 20** is there to warn us, *"And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you."* So if you hear these verses and you are thinking, *"You know who needs to hear this?"* You have missed the point of the text and you are now lying to yourself. We are all sinners and it was our sin that murdered Christ.
3. **Here is the amazing thing that ought to move us to worship of Jesus. Christ** was sent to the cross by false witnesses and He died on the cross for liars so that He in order to accomplish the last part of **v. 19**, *"... purge the evil from your midst."* Christ's death on the cross was in our place and for our sin in order to purge the evil from our hearts and make us holy.

Conclusion: [Move down to the Lord's Supper Table]

Illst: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe;

- Set up the quote for when Aslan was killed
- *"It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew a Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before time dawned, she would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."*²
- **This is what Christ has done for His people in order to save and for those who have faith in death itself is working backwards.** You see the glory of God is seen in **Deuteronomy 19** in that the One who was truly innocent was killed in the traitor's stead, we are the traitors and now by our faith in Him He has become our city of Refuge, our place of safety from the penalty of our sin.
- **Friend have you trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord?** If you have then death itself is working backwards for you because you have been given eternal life in Jesus.
- **Brother and sister in Christ our response is to flee to Christ who is our Refuge.** When you feel the guilt and shame of your sin is bearing down on you like the avenger of blood, run to Him. It is by the innocent blood of Christ that you are cleansed and forgiven.

Communion

- **Silence:** A time to examine our hearts before communion

² C. S. Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, p. 125.

- Lord's Supper:
- Blessing

1 Peter 1:3-7: ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness