

Law and Order (Part 3)
Deuteronomy 21:1-22:4

Intro: Pray

Illst: I went on a ski trip in 1999 to Winter Park, CO with my friend Paul Irby.

- We violated the skier's code of conduct. Paul & I did not live up to the skier's code of conduct.
- The problem I had on the ski slope is the same problem Israel had and the same problem we all have. No one lives life rightly before the face of God.
- What we are going to see in Deuteronomy is that Israel could not live up to God's law. Our text today is a prime example of it.

Deuteronomy is the second giving of the Ten Commandments. In particular Moses is explaining them in order to prepare Israel to go into the Promise Land. Our text today is Moses' exposition of the sixth commandment: "*You shall not murder.*"

The way to think of the Ten Commandments is to view it through the lens of Great Commandment, which says ³⁷*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* ³⁸*This is the great and first commandment.* ³⁹*And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* ⁴⁰*On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:37-40)

Commandments one through four deal with what it means to love Yahweh and commandments *six through ten cover what it means to love your neighbor.* What we are looking at this morning is how the sixth commandment: "*You shall not murder,*" unfolds what it means to love our neighbor in **Deuteronomy 21:1-22:4.**

Now this passage seems very eclectic but what holds it together is this big idea: *Israel's enjoyment of God and their inheritance of the land depended on being right with Yahweh (God) and loving their neighbor.* If you listen closely as we work through this text you will hear echoes of the Golden Rule: *treat others as you would have them treat you.*

Transition: Let's walk through the text so we can see what God was calling for His people to do so they would enjoy the gift of life in the land of promise and then make application to us. To begin this morning I want to begin the message with the last section of the passage: **Deuteronomy 22:1-4.**

I. What was it that God expected of Israel? God expects you to seek your neighbor's welfare (Deuteronomy 22:1-4)

Israel was to be careful to seek the welfare of their neighbors. The word *brother* is mentioned 5 times in the text and referred to with the pronouns a total of 14 times. The illustration of the animal and lost item is the argument from the lesser to the greater. This meant the people of Israel were to serve their neighbor in the most basic of ways. *This was the Golden Rule: They were to treat others the way they wanted to be treated.*

Just by way of review, the sixth commandment . . . "you shall not murder," did not mean they could not go to war nor did it mean they could not have laws that applied the punishment of death. The sixth commandment was the prohibition to not murder but it also meant that Israel was to love their neighbor in the same way they loved themselves.

Murder was against the law but seeking the welfare of neighbors was the positive application of the law. That is what it meant when it said *when you see your brother's ox or sheep going astray you were to not pretend you did not see it wandering off and do nothing.* To ignore this poor animal is to not love your neighbor and seek what is best for him.

Application: Jesus helps us understand how to love our neighbor in the parable of The Good Samaritan.

- **Luke 10:25-37,** ²⁵*And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

²⁶*He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"* ²⁷*And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all*

your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Two Quick Points of Application:

1. **This is what God expects of His people.** We are to seek the welfare of our neighbors even if we do not know them, even if we do not even like them. So how are you doing loving your neighbor? If you are struggling to love your neighbor then confess it to Christ.
 - a. Ask for help. One of the goals of our small groups is to learn how to love our neighbors well.
 - b. Perhaps you get in a small group so you can serve with others who are struggling and begin to love your neighbors well.
2. **But here lies the problem.** We are sinners and we struggle to seek the welfare of our neighbors. We cannot even keep our own little set of codes like returning ski apparel to the bottom of the ski slope much less follow God’s rules and expectations. But this does not mean we just give up. It means we turn to the only One who has ever loved His neighbor well—Jesus Christ. On the cross Jesus just didn’t die for his friends He died for His enemies. He died that they might possess the greatest gift God can give—eternal life that results in a relationship with Him.

Did you catch how Jesus connected having eternal life to what it means to seek the welfare of your neighbor?

To have eternal life means to know and love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. To be in a relationship with God is the best gift in the world. This is what it means to “*inherit*” eternal life. This is the greatest inheritance a person could receive.

Transition: *I want us to think back to Israel. Remember the big idea: for them to enjoy their inheritance they must live rightly in the sight of God.* It means God must be primary in their lives and that overflows in the seeking of the welfare of their neighbors. This is what it means to live before the face of God. Their problem is the same as ours: no one does it perfectly. **Now let’s go to Deuteronomy 21:1-9.**

II. To enjoy the gift of life from God all sin must be made right with God (Deuteronomy 21:1-9)

Verses 1-9 sound like an episode of Law and Order in that there is an unsolved murder. The men of the city did not know who killed the man but because people are created in the image of God the blood spilled must be accounted for before the face of God. So elders of the nearest city would do this strange ritual of taking a heifer that had never been worked and break its neck and wash their hands over the animal and tell God they were not responsible for the man’s death. The goal of the ritual was to remove

the guilt of spilling innocent blood (not innocent in the sense of sinless but in the legal sense that the man did nothing to deserve death).

Here is the principle: In order to enjoy God and God's good gifts, sin must be paid for and made right with God. Two key phrases: **v. 1:** *"If in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess . . ."* and **v. 9:** *" . . . when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD."*

Application:

Verses 1-9 begin to dig a hole that we get stuck in. Here is what I mean. You see it is not just the sin of murder that must be given account for but ALL sin. All sin will be answered for before the face of God. **Here is the problem:** **Hebrews 10:4** tells us that the blood of bulls and goats does not atone for sin. The killing of those animals never took away sin. *"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."* What are we to do? Do you even care?

Do you and I care about what v. 9 says, you must do right in the sight of the LORD (Yahweh)? Do you and I care that we have sinned against God? Do you care what God thinks about how you live your life? Are you prepared to stand before God and give an account of your life and answer for you sins? How will your sin be atoned for before God? You see our sin digs a hole that we cannot get ourselves out of.

III. To enjoy the gift of life from God others must be treated with honor, dignity, respect, compassion and mercy (Deuteronomy 21:10-14)

Let's just be honest. **Verses 10-14** sound kind of strange to our ears that is unless you have been in a war, captured a woman and married her. While this passage may sound strange to our ears, to the men of 15th century B.C., **vv. 10-15** also sounded strange. To treat a woman you had taken in war with dignity, respect, honor, compassion and mercy was not the norm.

Verses 10-15 benefited women captured in war in four ways. **First** they were to not be raped or enslaved. **Second** they were to be given time to adjust to the traumatic situation and mourn the death of their parents. **Third** the man was not permitted to have intercourse with the woman during the time of mourning. **Fourth/Finally** if the man changed his mind and would not marry the woman she was to be set free. He could not take advantage of her by selling her as a slave nor could she become his property.¹ Yahweh was teaching His people human rights in the 15th century B.C. *A law like this one made Israel very distinct from the nations that surrounded her because these men were being called to honor and respect those women, act in dignified ways toward them and to show the compassion and mercy.*

Application: Jesus takes a rule like this one a step further. In **Matthew 5:43-48**, He says, ⁴³*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"* ⁴⁴*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* ⁴⁵*so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* ⁴⁶*For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* ⁴⁷*And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?* ⁴⁸*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

But who has done this? Who has loved his neighbor perfectly much less his enemy? The words of **Deuteronomy 21:10-14** and **Jesus' words in Matthew 5** convict us of our sin against God. We have not love for others as we ought. We have not treated them with dignity, respect and honor. We have not shown others compassion and mercy when we had the chance.

It seems the hole that has been dug in vv. 1-9 is now deeper for who has always treated others with respect, dignity, honor, compassion and mercy? **Answer:** No one! The hole our sin has put us in is getting deeper.

¹ Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, p. 234.

IV. To enjoy the gift of life from God we must act rightly with others. (Deuteronomy 21:15-17)

If a man has two wives the first born of favorite wife cannot be the firstborn heir if the true firstborn son is of the unloved wife. *Right from the start here is another situation that is difficult for us to relate to because it is locked in the culture of the day.* Polygamy was not God's original plan.

However, the principle is clear: people have proper rights. The firstborn son of the unloved wife was still the firstborn and the rights of inheritance belonged to him. This was what was right in the sight of the LORD. The father was not to play favorites.

Application: While this scenario of Scripture may sound strange to us the principle is not because we understand what favoritism is. Our tendency is to play favorites while in the process we trample on the rights of others.

Our nation has been very guilty of this in its past. Favoritism has trampled on the rights of others in society where whites get preference over other races, rich get preference over the poor, the attractive get preferences over the unattractive and the list of inequities goes on and on.

Yet while it is easy for us to point to societal favoritism this passage hits closer to home. Where in your own life does favoritism walk over the rights of others?

Perhaps it is how you speak to some people and not others. Perhaps it is excluding someone for some reason. Perhaps it is the desire for your own ease and comfort that you play favorites.

Illst: Visiting Brenda on our last trip to Texas. "*You were always my favorite.*" [She never played favorites. She invited to family gathers her ex-daughter-in-law and her new husband and his kids. Their family became her family. I learned about how to love those who make me uncomfortable from her.]

- **Question:** Have you ever been the unloved child? I am a child of divorce so I kind of know what that feels like. It hurts. It is painful. It is difficult being the odd-child out.
- **To live rightly in the sight of the LORD we should be impartial with others.** We treat others with equity. You see to enjoy the gift of life that God has given you we must love the hard to love, the odd-person out and the difficult to love or whatever their issue is that makes the one who would not be your favorite.
- **Who has ever done this perfectly?** Not me.
- **Here is the problem:** The hole being dug by our sin is getting deeper. What do you do when you have not lived life rightly in the sight of the LORD? How do receive forgiveness for your sin?

V. To enjoy the gift of life from God both family and community must protect the gift of God (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

On the flip side of the favorite son was the rebellious son who was to be punished. In our child-centered age this text seems harsh for us to hear. However, this was not simple rebellion where the young man did something one time. This was a young adult male who had a long-standing lifestyle of rebellion against God, his parents and the community of faith at large.

Furthermore, his parents had done their part by pleading with him to repent but he had refused to listen. Then the parents, who were at their wits-end, go to the elders of the city and tell them that their son will not listen or repent. Then the men of the city sentence him to death and stone him in order to purge the evil from the people of Israel. This sounds harsh.

To understand this text you must have a category in your brain that says—life with God is primary! If you do not have this category then you will not understand what was at stake here.

God was at stake for the larger community. His sin was jeopardizing the whole community of faith. In their community of faith that kind of long-standing sin was to not be tolerated because it will not just burn down his family's life but it put the whole community of faith in jeopardy of falling away from God. This young man's sin set a bad example for others and he was to be made an example of in order to deter future young men from going down this path.

Application: How do we apply a text like this one? A couple of ways: **first** we do not live in a theocratic society where we apply these kinds of laws. However, we do have a government that will apply punishment to those who break the law. Law and order will be maintained and our society will apply those laws to lawbreakers.

Second, the hole is getting deeper still. We must understand that **WE** are the rebellious son. The question is not: why does this not happen anymore? **Instead the question is:** why when you and I were in rebellion to God did God not do this to us? You and I continually sin against God over and over and yet He does not kill us as we deserve. Yet if we continue in this lifestyle and reject God, we will give an account of our lives to Him.

John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* If you believe in Christ you have eternal life but if you do not then it is to perish in eternal death.

VI. To enjoy the gift of life from God the law and order must be maintained (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

If a man has committed a crime that is punishable by death then he is executed and hung on a tree as his humiliation for his crime. Humiliation was part of his punishment. However, he was to not remain hung on the tree all night so that the land of inheritance would be defiled. Again this is about God and life with God.

Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright says that the hanging of a criminal only occurred in exceptional circumstances in Israel. It was meant to be a deterrent to future crimes and to show that this crime was an offense against God and desecration of the inheritance of the land² and remember Israel could not enjoy their inheritance unless they were obedient to God.

Application: The application of **vv. 22-23** is this: Everyone who has ever lived offended God with their sin because we are all born sinners who have rejected the inheritance of Christ that He has been given to us. As **Romans 3:23** says, *"for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* And **Ephesians 2** says, *"we are dead in our trespasses and sins."*

Friends when we hear texts like this we should realize we are now at the bottom of this hole of sin and we cannot get out. We cannot climb our way out or earn our way out because we are dead in our sin with no hope.

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

The Apostle Paul picked up on the seriousness of our dilemma in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. Listen to what he said to the Galatian church in **Galatians 3:10-14:** *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."*

Friend if you are here and you are not a Christian you need to know Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died the criminal's death from Deuteronomy 21:22-23 even though He had never sinned. So why did He die that death? He died that death because your sin had put you so deep in a hole and had killed you that He came and took your place and died the death you deserved because He loves you. He was loving you. **He was seeking your welfare so you could enjoy the inheritance of eternal life and a relationship with God. He died to make God primary in your life.**

² Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, p. 236-237.

If you are here are you are a Christian then our hearts should sing as we are reminded that it should have been us who was executed for our sin. We are the rebellious son who deserved death, the criminal who sinned against God and the one who shed innocent blood of the Son of God because of our sin. He was shamed, disrespected, beaten for us and treated like a common slave so that we might be received as a son who is an heir of the King, given the blessing of the inheritance of eternal life with God.

Have you trusted Christ today?

Time of silence and confession and prayer before we take the Lord's Supper together.

Lord's Supper:

1. We welcome all baptized Christians who are sorry for their sin, love Jesus, and desire to serve him to join us in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. To others among us: we are deeply grateful you are with us; we are eager to share with you the joy of knowing Jesus and of living together as Jesus' disciples. We warmly invite you to reflect on and pray the following prayers.

As we prepare for the Lord's Supper, I would ask you to reflect on praying this prayer silently to the Lord: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. In the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

2. Silence & Prayer
3. Invite the Men to come Forward
4. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord has prepared his table for all who love him and trust in him alone for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him, are now invited to come with gladness to the table of the Lord.
5. Instructions to hold the bread and juice until the time where we take the meal together.
6. Taking of the Lord's Supper:

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup, saying,

"This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me."

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord until he comes.

With thanksgiving, let us offer God our grateful praise.

—based on 1 Corinthians 11:23-26