

Exodus 22:16-23:13: The Justice of God

Leader Guide 10/18/09



PLEASE NOTE! – In the coming weeks, Summit Church will be studying Exodus 19-34 during corporate worship and in small groups. While the small groups will study these texts in order, the sermon may not correspond to the precise chapter week by week. However, the themes that pervade both sermon and small group will overlap considerably over the next several weeks. On Sundays and throughout the week, the goal is to grow in our understanding and respond rightly as a church to the Holy God who appeared to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Also, please note a new section starting this week- a prayer guide based on the themes of this text.

Context: When studying the specific stipulations that God gives to His people, it is important to remember the general purpose of the Law. In Genesis, God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation that would become a blessing for all other nations. In Exodus, God heard the nation's cries and saved them out of oppression. The nation Israel was pulled out of slavery so that they can worship God. When they get to Mount Sinai, God calls them a "holy nation" and His "treasured possession." They are headed to the Promised Land, where they are commanded to establish a just society based upon God's laws.

Here is where the Law fits into this salvation story. Verses 19:4-6 and 20:2 begin the law discourse with a reminder that God has saved them (salvation comes before law). Furthermore, the laws in 22:21, 22:27, 23:9, 23:15 specifically reference aspects of their salvation story as the rationale for these laws, and the idea is implicit in many other laws. This nation's response to God's salvation was worship. A large part of that worship was to live obediently to God's directives. Throughout the Exodus story, God has demonstrated that He alone is worthy of their devotion. Their obedience to the laws would be the outward expression of that devotion.

Last week, we established that the Ten Commandments reveal God's character. The laws in chapters 21-23 provide test cases for the ethics found in the Ten Commandments. Thus, Jesus' statement that the whole law can be summed up by saying "love God and love your neighbor" applies to this passage as well. God's character does not change. Thus, whatever we see of God's character in these laws is helpful and revealing for us today (even if particular laws may not be directly applicable). When Israel followed these laws, they put God's character on display in tangible ways for neighboring nations. This was one of the main ways that God's "holy nation" and "treasured possession" became a blessing for all nations.

Theme: God saves this nation and gives them His law so that, as they are obedient to these laws, they will put God's character on display. The intended affect of these laws on the people was that they would become different ("holy") and devoted. They were to be different, not just for the sake of being weird, but to give tangible expression to God's characteristics. For instance, God steered them away from mistreatment, falsehood, favoritism, hatred, bribery, hunger- the types of oppression that they would have faced in Egypt. The same compassion that He showed for this poor and friendless nation of strangers, He also required among His people. God's golden rule is: do unto others as I have done for you.

Furthermore, the people were to be devoted solely to Him. Any hint of worship to other gods was punishable by death (22:18-20)! The people were not to blaspheme God and some of the laws regarding meat, milk, altars, and sexual practices were prohibitions against pagan rituals of those days. God is jealous, and thus demanded their full devotion to Him through obedience to the Law.

Aim: To show our devotion to Him in everything we do. Following these laws was the Israelite expression of worship to the God who saved them from oppression. Let us express our thankfulness for Christ's salvation by following the commands that He gave to us. Let us put His character on display with how we live.

Prayer: In response to the God that we are meeting at Mount Sinai these next few weeks, we urge small groups to spend extra time in His Presence through prayer. Here are some suggestions for prayer based on this text:

- Declare to God why He alone is worthy of our devotion.
- Pray through Psalm 119:49-64 and express your thankfulness for God's law.
- Identify those who are oppressed living among us and pray for their welfare.
- Pray that God would continue to guide the Summit into better and deeper ways to serve our community.

Study Questions:

What points from this Sunday's sermon "hit home" for you? Why?

What aspect of God's character most impacted you in your reflection on this week's sermon?

[22:16-31]

Do any of these laws draw your attention as being particularly applicable in our society?

Opinion question, let folks observe and analyze specific laws. One example might be: 22:25 which is the underlying principle for Habitat for Humanity offering interest free loans to its clients.

What aspects of God's character emerge from these laws?

Jealousy, justice (repaying those who oppress others), compassion, mercy.

How do these laws relate to Israel's salvation from the Egyptians?

If God freed them from being oppressed sojourners, then it would be a perversion of justice to use their newfound freedom to oppress other sojourners, or the poor and weak of their own people. Refer to Exodus 20:2 and to Moses' demand of Pharaoh- let my people go, *that* they may worship God.

[23:1-13]

Do any of these laws draw your attention as being particularly applicable to us today?

Possible example: 23:5- go out of your way to be kind, even to those who hate you!!

How would God's character be revealed to Israel's neighbors if Israel did not follow God's laws?

God's compassion, justice, and or jealousy would burn against evildoers and protect the weak. Eventually, this meant Exile for Israel. As exiles, they were to put God's laws on display living among foreigners since they did not exert enough faith to set up a just society of their own.

Why did God save the Israelites? For what purpose has God saved us?

They were saved, and we are saved to give God glory. In both cases, the act of that salvation itself was glorious, as is the affect that it has on the people of God. When a life changes its course based upon God's activity, He is glorified. When we imitate Him and bend our wills towards His, He gets glory. When we sing and pray our thankfulness for salvation, He gets glory.

[22:16-23:13]

Is it natural for you to view obedience as worship? What are some ways that your behavior can glorify God?

What is the difference between obedience because of duty and obedience because of worship?

Where is idolatry common in America? Where is idolatry in your own life?

Opinion question. Example: JD has touched on our devotion to sports teams.

What are some ways that the Church can put God's character on display in the world? What are some ways that the Summit can put God's character on display in the triangle?