

Love Like He Loves

A sermon on Deuteronomy 24:17-22 by Pastor Jason Liebenow

What are your thoughts on welfare? I'm sure we could have a pretty lively chat about that, but for now let's put down our opinions and look at God's thoughts on the matter. In our Old Testament lesson, God commands the Israelites to set up a system to provide for those who could not provide for themselves.

A couple things, first off, this was the nation of Israel, a unique group of people in world history. Here, the church was the state. Second, notice that God commanded these things of each person. God expected each person to follow his commands. The two commands from our lesson were: 1) don't take advantage of the weak, and 2) provide for those in need. And they were to do that by simply leaving some of the fruits of their labor right where they were so that whoever needed them could go and harvest them.

Essentially, God's welfare plan for the Israelites was this: the Israelites were to love each other in the same way God loved them. This is the same way our God calls us to live today: Love like He Loves. And here's the motivation: 1) Remember your Redemption, and 2) Believe in the Blessings.

God wants us to Love like He Loves. And in this section, God is very clear on why he commands this. Twice he tells the Israelites: "Remember your Redemption."

God wanted the Israelites to remember their own past. They were once slaves, the bottom of society. Their masters took advantage of them, but God redeemed them from that. Every time the Israelites saw the have-nots, God wanted them to remember back to when they had nothing. God wanted them to remember how he had redeemed them. He wanted them to remember the ten plagues, the parting of the Red

Sea. God wanted his people to remember that they once struggled too, but He had saved them from that life. Now they were free.

The memory of their slavery and redemption gave the Israelites compassion for others who were struggling. Instead of taking advantage of others, the Israelites would want to help and provide for these people just as God helped and provided for them.

What a different vision from the world we live in, right? We look around and we see people taking advantage of others and even using the legal system to do it. People stockpile luxuries, while ignoring others who can't even put food on the table.

Brothers and sisters, while we condemn those sins, let's also recognize the same sin in ourselves. Like the world around us, we too are sinners. We naturally put ourselves first and don't readily think about what another might need. When we have opportunity to take advantage of someone else, our sinful nature reasons out we deserve this, and the other person deserves to pay for it! When we plan how to spend our money, we naturally think of all the ways we can improve our lives, but we don't so quickly consider what good that money can do for others.

This is why today; God encourages us: Remember your Redemption. We were once slaves. We were once stuck in slavery to sin. Selfishness was all we knew. I imagine it is not hard to think of times in your own life when you were selfish. And the only thing we can really get from that selfish way of life is guilt; guilt that earns us God's wrath, guilt that leaves us empty and alone, guilt that deserves God's punishment.

Remember your former slavery, but remember that God has redeemed you. No matter how you have treated others in the past, God still had compassion on you. He sent Jesus to live, die, and rise again from the dead. He did that to pay the full price for your sin; to buy you

back from the slavery that once ruled your life. And Jesus' payment was his blood; the very blood of God was shed to pay for you. The suffering and death of the one and only innocent man was your payment. But Jesus was happy to do that. Why? Because he knew that it meant your freedom; freedom from sin, freedom from death, freedom from the devil.

And now you are free. You are free to Love like He Loves. Never forget that. You have a freedom that the rest of the world cannot even imagine. The rest of the world is still trapped in slavery to sin. You are not! The rest of the world is trapped in their selfishness. You can show love in a way the sinful world cannot. Through faith in Jesus, you can love others in a way that lets your light shine. You can love others in a way that pleases God. Remember your Redemption and Love like He Loves!

Here is a perfect example in our Gospel lesson for today. Before Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, an expert in the law asked him what he had to do to be saved. The rest of the world who are still slaves to sin are stuck asking that question: What do I have to do? That is a slave's question. The rest of the world is still trying to find out what they have to do to be saved because they are still slaves.

But you are freed from that. You no longer have to ask, "What do I have to do?" Instead, because you know Christ did what you had to do, you are free to ask the real questions; questions like "To whom can I be a neighbor?" "How can I show love to others like God has shown love to me?"

And will God not bless us when we do Love like He Loves? God tells us Believe in the Blessings! God told his people, the Israelites, that when they provided for the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widows, God would bless all the work of their hands. That was a very real promise to those people who lived back then.

God does not promise us prosperity in everything we do today, but he does still promise to bless us. He promises that all things will work for our good. So let's hold on to those blessings.

When God gives us opportunity to share our money with those in need, let us remember that God has promised to bless us with all we need. We do not need to selfishly fear that our generosity might leave us empty. We hold on to God's promises. When we feel the temptation to take advantage of someone else, we can walk away from that, because whatever we could gain by that sin, we know that God has planned greater blessings for us than anything that we could gain sin. Hold on to God's blessings.

Brothers and Sisters, Love like He Loves. Remember your Redemption. Believe in the Blessings. And Love like He Loves. Think about that this week. Talk about it with your friends and families. Think of a new way that you can show love to those around you.

Is there a job around the house that you could help your family with? Maybe you can reach out and listen more to that person at work who no one seems to get along with. Is there someone whom you've taken advantage of or someone whom you look down on? Next time you see that person, remember how God has so incredibly blessed you, even though you were once a slave to sin. Show the same love and compassion to that person.

Again I encourage you to find a new way to show love to the people in your life. God has already blessed you so much and he promises to bless you even more. And on top of all of that, you have heaven to look forward to! God has blessed you with an ability that the world does not know. You can love in a way that the world cannot even imagine, because in Jesus, God has loves you in an unimaginable way. Amen.