

Good News Worth Celebrating: Deuteronomy 21:10-22:12**Matthew Williams****8/27/2023****INTRODUCTION**

It's good to be back with you, brothers and sisters. Chris and I had a wonderful time in Bolivia last week, We served both Sovereign Grace Church of Santa Cruz, led by David Del Castillo, as well as another church in Cochabamba that's pursuing adoption into our denomination, led by Erick Miranda.

Every fall, David organizes a 3-day conference for the members of his church and believers from around Bolivia who are hungry for biblical teaching and worship that makes much of Christ. I preached on God's design for the family in Gen 1-2 and taught a workshop on engaging biblically with same-sex attraction. Chris and his wife Maria were able to speak about parenting. It was the first time Chris has given a message entirely in Spanish. I was super proud of him!

The Spirit impressed three realities on my heart as I flew back. First, God is building his church in Santa Cruz. After several years of faithful sowing, the Lord is providing co-workers for David and his wife Jadwy who are mature in the faith, eager to serve, and upholding his arms as a pastor in practical ways. That's a significant answer to prayer!

Second, God sovereignly uses the details of our lives to advance the gospel. We wouldn't be involved in Bolivia if Chris hadn't married a Bolivian woman named Maria. Maria is totally in her element down there. Chatting it up in Spanish, guarding me as the American guy from eating things that could make me sick, and loving the members of the church, young and old alike. We thank God for you sister and the opportunities for gospel ministry God brought into our lives when he gave you to Chris and added both of you into our body. Friend, no detail of your life is accidental. The Lord can use all of it to advance the gospel.

Finally, though we live in different countries, we love the same Savior, submit to the same Word, and are committed to the same mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The moment you step off the plane, many things feel foreign. But the cultural differences only highlight the fact that the character and worth of our God is the same. And in a very real way, that's exactly what we experience when we read Deut 21-22.

Many of the cultural situations here are utterly foreign to us – female captives, multiple wives, lost donkeys, eating wild birds. We don't live in the Ancient Near East, nor are we under the authority of the Mosaic law in a covenant sense like the nation of Israel. And yet, who God is hasn't changed. He's the same, yesterday, today, and forever! That makes every law in this passage, no matter how foreign it feels, exceedingly relevant because it reveals the character of the Lawgiver.

Do you know who sponsored the first law in the United States regulating how fast you could drive a car? State representative Robert Woodruff submitted a bill to the Connecticut General Assembly in 1901 limiting automobiles to the blazing speed of 12 mph. Does that bill tell us anything reliable about Representative Woodruff's personal character? Not at all. It doesn't mean he cared about automobile safety. He may have been doing the bidding of a powerful lobbyist simply to get re-elected. We could try to find out, but the law he sponsored doesn't inherently reveal anything about the man's character.

Friends, the law of God reveals wonderful things about his character! That's what makes God's law different than our own laws. It's a perfect reflection of who he is and the kind of people we are called to be in light of who he is. The law reveals the Lawgiver that we might be conformed into his character. So here's what we're going to do. With each group of laws in this section, we're going to ask two questions: What does this law tell us about God? And what does it mean for us to be conformed to his character? So what does the first group of laws teach us about the Lawgiver?

1) HE DEFENDS THE WEAK AND VULNERABLE (21:10-17)

The case study in verse 10 opens with a scenario that God initiates. Israel is waging war against her enemies outside the land of Canaan. God grants them victory and their enemies are taken captive, including some beautiful women. Verse 11, "You see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her home to be your wife."

An Israelite warrior could have easily thought, "God gave these enemies into my hand, this woman included. So that means I can do whatever I want with her." That's exactly how the nations around Israel acted. Women were often abused, raped, enslaved, and treated as property. "It shall not be so in Israel," Moses declares. God's blessings come with God's requirements. God's word guides us in how to steward God's gifts. In this case, Yahweh laid down two requirements.

First, she must be given time to make a decisive and dignified break with her former people and their way of life. Shaving your head, paring your nails, removing your normal

clothing, were all cultural expressions of mourning. The woman had to die to her old life, including her family loyalties and false gods they worshiped.

Second, an Israelite warrior must honor the woman by physically providing for her for a whole month and then take her as his wife, not a concubine or slave, before he could have sexual relations with her. Christopher Wright captures the radically counter-cultural attitude God required. “The physical and emotional needs of the woman in her utter vulnerability were given moral and legal priority over the desires and claims of the man in his victorious strength.”

Such is God’s way, brothers and sisters. He’s a defender of the weak. He is watching how you relate to those who are under your power and influence, whether a friend, a co-worker, a family-member, or spouse. Gentlemen, he is especially watching how you use your physical strength. Do you protect the woman in your life, even when that means protecting them from yourself? Or do you take advantage of them?

If the same warrior wanted to divorce his wife, he had to let her go wherever she wanted, whether that meant remaining in Israel or returning to her family. Though she was originally a captive, he could not sell her into slavery for personal gain. Why not? Because (verse 14) you have already “Humiliated her” enough by divorcing her for the simple (and unbiblical) reason that you don’t like her anymore.

The next scenario in verses 15-17 is similar in that it protects another class of vulnerable women. In this case, a second wife who’s not her husband’s favorite and her oldest son. God never endorses polygamy in Scripture. To the contrary, Genesis 2 establishes the institution of marriage as a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. But as with divorce in verse 14, God regulates the situations our sin creates to protect the vulnerable.

In Israel’s day, the firstborn son had a right to a “Double portion” of his father’s inheritance. Scripture nowhere mandates the practice. It was a cultural norm and it came with significant responsibility. The firstborn son had to provide for his parents in their old age along with the rest of the family. If a man had two wives and his firstborn son belonged to the wife he didn’t love, he could practice favoritism (verse 16) by treating “the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn.” You may not do it,” Moses says. verse 17, “The right of the firstborn is his.”

This law also reminds us God is a defender of the weak. So what’s the lesson for us today? We must not bend the rules of justice to favor our friends and injure our

enemies. How often our sense of what someone is rightly entitled to receive changes based on whether we like them or not!

If a politician we like is charged with a crime, we declare the whole thing is a scam. But if a politician we don't like is indicted, we declare, "It's about time!" Friends, our commitment to biblical love and justice isn't tested by how we treat our friends but how we treat our enemies. Do you play favorites with your employees or children? Or do you give the neighbor what he is due as an image-bearer of God, even when you don't like them very much. Even when it's within your power to withhold good from them. Who is the Lawgiver? He defends the weak and vulnerable.

2) HE IS FULL OF JUSTICE AND MERCY (21:18-23)

In verses 18-21, Moses deals with the case of a "Stubborn and rebellious son," verse 18, "Who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them." What should his parents do? Verse 21, bring him to the elders of the city so that the men of the city can "Stone him to death."

Why was publicly flaunting the authority of your parents a capital crime? Because the son isn't just rejecting his parents' voice. He's rejecting God's voice. That's the ultimate reason for the 5th commandment. Honor the Lord by honoring our father and mother. And his entrenched rebellion threatens the spiritual life of the entire community. Verse 20, the man has abandoned himself to sensuality as "A glutton and a drunkard". His behavior is public, visible, and scandalous – the very sort of sin the Lord warned would send the entire nation into exile.

Under the New Covenant, we obey the command in verse 21 to "Purge the evil from your midst" by practicing church discipline. Removing people from membership in the church when unrepentant sin in their lives is equally visible and scandalous. But while the temporal consequences of disobedience have changed, so to speak, the character of God has not. So what does this law tell us about God? That he's a holy God, who requires holiness from his people, regardless of your age, and doesn't tolerate unrepentant sin.

There's a special warning to young men here. Guys, there's a reason the case study isn't focused on daughters. Young men are uniquely vulnerable to pride. Most of the church discipline situations we have navigated over the last year have involved men, especially young men. Take heed, my brothers. Be on guard against a stubborn and rebellious attitude in your hearts. Where you see it, confess it to an older brother in the faith and ask for prayer. Strive for the humility without which no one will see the Lord.

And when we need to discipline an unrepentant member. Brothers and sisters, remember that discipline is an expression of God's grace for our entire church. When that happens, all of us should "Hear and fear" as Moses says in verse 21. We serve a God of absolute justice who does not tolerate sin. And yet he's also a God of abundant mercy.

In the Ancient Near East, the body of someone who had been executed was often hung in a public place as a deterrent to others to not commit the same crime. When that happens, Moses says in verse 23, "His body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God." That curse, that shame, is what every one of us deserve on account of our sin. And that is precisely what God became for us. Galatians 3:13, "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.'"

Have you ever thought about who killed the Son of God? The Jews falsely accused him. The Romans unjustly crucified him. But who killed him? The Father did. Isaiah 53:10, "It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief..." Why did the Father crush the Son? Because in that moment, as Jesus hung on the cross, he bore the guilt and shame of our sin, he received the judgment we deserve.

What's the heart of the gospel, brothers and sisters? The good news that God became a man to bear our curse so that all who trust him for salvation could stop hiding in shame and fear. So fear not, Christian. Jesus bore your curse and carried your shame into the grave. He has removed your defilement of your sin so that you can confess your sin, be cleansed from your sin, and discover to your eternal joy that in Jesus the God of justice is also a God of mercy! Who is the Lawgiver? He is full of justice and mercy.

3) HE DOES NOT IGNORE THE AFFLICTED (22:1-4)

If the previous scenarios dealt with our response to sin, Deuteronomy 22:1-4 addresses our response to misfortune. What should we do in a situation where a neighbor is experiencing material trouble or loss? Verses 1-2 captures the heart of the matter, "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him."

The Lord establishes three requirements for biblical compassion when our neighbor has a material need. First, we must pay attention. Verse 1, "You shall not see...and ignore." Verse 3, "You may not ignore it." Verse 4, "You shall not see...and ignore them." How

easy it is, brothers and sisters, to be so consumed with our own comfort, our own convenience, our own security, our own lives, and give little to no attention to suffering around us.

We say, “I’m too busy to get involved. Besides, their life is messy.” What does our God say? Psalms 22:24, “For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and has not hidden his face from him, but has heard...” Psalms 9:12, “He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.” We must pay attention because our God pays attention.

Second, we must take action. There is no biblical category in verses 1-4 for a bless their heart, I’ll be sure to add your donkey to my prayer list, or why aren’t the pastors or deacons doing something kind of response. Both “Taking” a lost ox or sheep back to a friend’s farm or bringing them “Home to your house” were intensely personal actions. Loving people is always like that. Everyone wants to be part of a welcoming church. But are you willing to create and sustain that culture by inviting someone you don’t know very well into your home for a meal?

Third, we must bear the cost of sacrificial love. Notice the little phrase in the middle of verse 2. “And it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it.” Well, how long is that, Moses? As long as it takes. You mean I have to pay for their food and water? Yep. But that’s going to cost me something. Exactly. Real love is always costly. There’s a cost to having someone live in your home. There’s a cost to devoting your Saturday morning to helping a friend or your adult children work on their home. There’s a cost to serving the church in an area of need that doesn’t line up with your personal preferences.

We must not live as if every need is our personal responsibility. There is only one Savior and it’s not you or me! But there is a world of difference between a “That’s their problem” way of doing life and a “Lord, how can I help?” way of doing life. Galatians 6:10 captures the heart of biblical compassion in response to material need. “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Who is the Lawgiver? He does not ignore the afflicted.

4) HE CREATED US FOR A PURPOSE (22:5)

The Lord cares about protecting and providing for those who bear his image. He also cares that we live in a way that reflects the goodness of his creative design. Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Your biological sex is not an accident, friend. And it's God's way of revealing the gender identity he has called you to embrace for his glory and your good. Our maleness and femaleness is not a cultural artifact or an aspect of our identity that we may customize like a Chick-fil-a order. It's a gift from God. Is it subject to the brokenness and disorder of life in a fallen world? Absolutely. But it's not a choose your own adventure.

Living as the man God created you to be, or the woman God created you to be, is one of the most important ways you reflect his image, my friend. That means the clothing we wear as men and women, no less than every other detail of our life, is not a spiritually neutral matter. It's an area of life where we must choose whether we will submit to God's authority by embracing his creative design or choose to go our own way. That's what the prohibition against cross-dressing in verse 5 is all about.

Now you won't find a cross-cultural definition in Scripture for what constitutes "A man's garment" or "A woman's cloak" today. What men wear and women wear varies widely across different cultures and time periods. But here's the core issue. Does the way you dress communicate joy or discontent with the fact that God made you a man or a woman? Ladies, does your clothing say, "I delight in being a woman!" Guys, does your clothing say, "I delight in being a man?" Or does it say something else?

I'm not talking about being "Traditional" or "Culturally conservative." I'm talking about signaling to a watching world in culturally appropriate ways that the sexual identity God gave you is exceedingly good. No detail in your life, Christian, is exempt from Christ's command to "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). That includes your gender. Who is the Lawgiver? He created us for a purpose.

5) HE UPHOLDS AND PROTECTS OUR LIFE (22:6-8)

What's the problem with eating a mother bird and the eggs? Everyone dies. There's no animal left to produce life for future generations. Living long in the land, Israel, requires that you consume the natural resources I have entrusted to you in a sustainable way, not a selfish way.

There are times I hear professing believers talk about environmental stewardship as if it's just a bunch of crockery. I have a right to burn what I want. I have a right to shoot what I want. I'm a Bible-believing Christian. I'm not one of these crazy, tree-hugging, nature-worshippers.

Brothers and sisters, we serve a God who delights to preserve, uphold, and sustain life - not just for one generation, but for generations to come. That's what the law in verses

6-8 tells us about God. And he requires the same attitude from us as his people. Environmental stewardship isn't a liberal issue. It's a biblical issue. Are we ruling over creation in a sustainable way that nourishes life in the future even as we benefit from it in the present? Or are we calloused and selfishly ignorant of the long-term consequences of our actions?

The same heart underlies the requirement in verse 8 to build a parapet or railing for the roof of your house. In the Ancient Near East, a flat roof was significantly cooler than the inside of a house. People often ate or slept on the roof. And building a parapet reflects something about who God is. He's a God who cares deeply about preserving human life. Friend, if you work in a blue-collar job where you have to pull permits and honor building codes, you are making much of God! You are reflecting his character in your work! Who is the Lawgiver? He upholds and protects our life.

6) HE IS PURE IN ALL HIS WAYS (22:9-12)

At first glance, requirements like verse 9 can seem completely pointless. "You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed..." Or verse 11, "You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together." Say what? Isn't that going a little too far, Lord? Isn't that the kind of stuff that turns people away from Christianity? Nothing our King requires – then or now – is ever pointless.

So what do these laws tell us about who God is? That he's utterly perfect, completely pure, in all his ways. There's nothing mixed, compromised, water-down, partial, or blended in his character. He is set-apart, holy, and unblemished. And he established specific rules in Israel to remind them and the surrounding nations that Yahweh is different. And because Yahweh is different, his people must be different. Because Yahweh is pure, his people must be pure.

The Apostle Paul establishes the same principle in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 where he calls us to flee worldliness and pursue purity in every aspect of our lives. "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.'"

Paul isn't talking about being different for the sake of being different. He's talking about devoting every area of your life to pleasing the Lord, which means every area of your life – from what you watch or read, to the words you speak or the way you spend your money – should be noticeably different than the world. Who is God? He's pure in all his ways and calls us to the same.

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, the law reveals the character of the Lawgiver. Who is our God? He's a defender of the weak, full of justice and mercy, who does not ignore the afflicted, who created us for a purpose, who delights to uphold and protect our life. Who is pure in all his ways. That's what Deuteronomy 21-22 shouts! Behold the goodness of our God.

But the law cannot conform us into his character. That work must come from the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17–18, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Yes, the law reveals the kind of people we must become in light of who our God is. But it's the Spirit who conforms us more and more into his image. It's the Spirit who takes the perfect law of God and makes us a people who defend the weak, are full of justice and mercy. Who do not ignore the afflicted. Who embrace God's purpose. ho uphold and protect life, and are pure in all our ways. He conforms us into the character of the Lawgiver.

That doesn't mean we sit passively and wait for change. It means we cry out to Jesus for the power we need to become more like Jesus so that the world would see Jesus in the way we live. He is our King, he is our hope, so let's ask him right now for the Spirit's help to be transformed more and more into his image.