

Text: Exod. 22:21-31

Title: "Israel's civil law: care for the needy"

Time: 11/7/2021

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Maureen and I attended a funeral a week ago Friday for which we had asked your prayers. The funeral unexpectedly became a time of intense spiritual warfare, and the cause of the gospel in that battle that afternoon was well-served by the pastor of the deceased, Pastor Kyle Wilcox of Mountain View Bible Church in Dublin.

Pastor Wilcox said many important things that afternoon, but one that will stick with me was something he said in his teaching on the Savior's command, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1). Kyle explained that when the Savior promised his disciples that they did not need to be troubled, He did so not because He was offering them a religion, but because He was offering them Himself. The Savior said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father, but by Me" (v. 7).

This gift of the Savior for a sinner's redemption was symbolized in the Exodus event in the Passover lamb. God did not save His people from the death angel with a new religion. He saved them with the blood of a sacrificial lamb. Because the lamb died, Israel was redeemed from Egypt's slavery. And because Jesus has died and has risen, believers are redeemed from the slavery of their unbelief and sin.

But in our passage, many days after the Exodus liberation, the Lord is taking great pains to give His redeemed people a new religion. The believer's need for a new pure religion is a biblical idea. We find the term *pure religion* in James 1:26-27, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and

bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James explains in these verses what pure religion is. It is the changed the life, the tongue included. For Israel, their nation was to be a nation governed by pure religion. For us in the New Testament era, our local churches are to be populated with believers practicing pure religion.

According to the passage in James, pure religion has two key components - care for the needy and keeping unspotted from the world. We find those components in Exodus 22 as well, because in this passage the Lord is speaking to this newborn nation about their need for pure religion. We saw a few weeks ago that verses 16-20 focus especially on keeping God's people unspotted from the world. Our passage this morning focuses on that other component of pure religion, caring for the needy. This morning our passage asks us to think of five categories of needs, and I would like us to consider them one at a time.

I. Care for the need of the stranger (v. 21).

Application: *Strange* or *foreign* is a term that the Lord often uses of false deities. At the end of his ministry, Joshua would warn Israel about strange gods (Josh. 24:20, "If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good."

So strange gods are to be carefully avoided, but Israel was to distinguish between the strange gods and the strangers who worshipped them. They were not to tolerate strange gods, but they were to welcome strangers into their nation.

One commentator (Davis, 241) points out that this regulation is unique to Israel among the nations of the ancient Near East. Israel was to welcome strangers, and the reason they were to do so was that they knew what it was like to be one from their experience in Egypt.

As members of a local church today, we too are to be welcoming to strangers, and the Lord wants us to welcome them for much the same reason he gives to Israel. We know what it is like to be exactly what they are – strangers before the Lord. Paul put it this way, “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12); “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

So, are we a church that is welcoming strangers to our assembly times while not welcoming the strange deities and the worship practices of strangers? Are we a church that empathizes with what it is like to be without God in the world? Caring for this need is an important part of the pure religion the Lord desires to develop within us.

II. Care for the need of the fatherless (vv. 22-24).

Illustration: In 1984 the former abortionist, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, produced a film called “The Silent Scream.” I was a student at Bob Jones University when the film came out, and I still can remember the showing of that film that we were all required to attend as students there. The film teaches its audience about the horrors of the suction abortion procedure, and then it shows an ultrasound of the abortion of an 11-week-old unborn child. Through the ul-

trasound, it is possible to see but not hear the painful scream of the child, which gave the film its name. In NH we have a new law about 24 weeks, but that falls far short. Two of our fellow-citizens wrote letters to the editor in our town's paper complaining that the new law was an attack on women's healthcare.

Application: These verses tell us emphatically that the Lord can hear these silent screams (v. 23). They are not silent to Him. He can hear the cries of the broken mother too. In the Scripture an orphan is someone who does not have a faithful father, someone fatherless. That is why the children of widows are called orphans. The majority of unborn victims of abortion are undoubtedly fatherless children. Whether born or unborn, the Lord hears the cries of those caused to suffer by profiteers like our nation's liberal politicians and their abortion industry.

The Lord deals with these oppressors, our passage tells us, with a sword – by allowing the fathers of a nation like ours to fall on the battlefields of war. On the basis of our passage's teaching, may we not conclude that our never-ending war on terror is a consequence of our nation's willingness to vote for and finance the holocaust of abortion? Mothers and children need better. They need good fathers.

And so, we are a local church in a fatherless world. Each of us needs to be busy about the needs of ministering to fatherless children and their mothers. Whom like that will we care for this way this week? Their need is not hard to find.

III. Care for the need of the poor (vv. 25-27).

Application: The reason pure religion has two components is that the God who is worshipped and served by pure religion has two wonderful characteristics – God is holy, so

keep yourself unspotted from the world; and God is gracious, so care for the needy. Here the needy are the poor. We must care for the poor, not by subsidizing his refusal to earn an honest living, but by not taking advantage of his desperate situation. The Lord does not want the poor of His people caught in the quicksand of unending debt, and He wants them to have their coats so that they have something to cover their skin and keep them warm at night.

Just as we are to be holy like our God is holy, so we are to be gracious to the needy like our God is gracious to the needy. Ps. 112:4-5, "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion." Remember what the Apostle Paul taught the elders of Ephesus about this graciousness? He said, "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:34-35).

Illustration: God's grace is a generous giver. My brother serves at a church called Grace Church in Mentor, OH. God has blessed this church with an amazing generosity for the needs of the poor in the work of the Lord. One of their ministries is called Arch Ministries, a network of pastors, who try to help one another in the ministry.

At our last board meeting, we were instructed to let Arch know of financial needs in our region, so I had an opportunity to be a point person for some gracious giving to the work of two needy sister churches. One church plant needs some windows for their early 20th-century building. The total cost would be \$22,000, and they needed \$4,000 more. Another pastor friend of mine has a young family that he is supporting on a tight pastor's salary. His truck needed new

rocker panels and tires for the winter, so I asked Arch for \$2,000 to help this brother. This past week Arch sent both brothers a \$5,000 check. If there is anything I have learned from Arch, it is this truth from the example of our Lord Jesus – It is more blessed to give than to receive.

IV. Care for the need of civil authorities (v. 28).

Application: The need here is a need for appropriate respect. You may remember that we have spoken of the Hebrew convention of using the term *God* for civil leaders. That is being done in this verse where our KJV translators use the English word *gods*. In Exod. 21:6, they translated the same word *judges*, and that is the better understanding here. It is the word *gods*, but it refers to civil leaders. Civil leaders are gods in the sense that they are ordained by God to be a terror to evil and a support of what is good (Rom. 13:1-5). As such, we must show respect for their office, whomever may be occupying that office. Israel had Moses and the 70 elders, but Paul's situation was closer to our own with the Neros and the Pilates of the world.

In America, the ultimate civil authority in our God-ordained government is the people. Ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. To the extent that the people are disrespected in our land, this command not to do so to civil leaders is violated. As Christians, we must stand up for liberty against tyranny, but we must do so without wearing a "Let's Go Brandon" tee shirt, and without retweeting SNL's depiction of the "Orange Man."

V. Care for the needs of the Lord's work (vv. 29-31).

Application: It would not be appropriate to speak here of caring for the needs of the Lord, because the Lord has no

needs. But these verses are directed especially toward meeting the needs of the Lord's work. In Israel's day this was the work of the temple and its priesthood. In our day, it is the work of the local church and their pastors. The Lord is clear that these gifts are to be an unhindered first priority of our spending.

Illustration: The Gospels speak of two ladies who were especially exemplary in this regard. Because of one, we still speak of how precious the widow's mite is, and we learn from her that the issue that the Lord sees in our giving is not the amount of money, but the amount of sacrifice.

And then on the other end of the financial spectrum, we find Mary and her expensive ointment. You may remember how angry greedy Judas became when Mary wasted the ointment on the Lord Jesus to prepare Him for His burial. She was expressing her thanks to the Lord for His willingness to die for her sins, and though the gift may not have been as sacrificial as the widow's mite, Mary's love is an example to us of the way God loves a cheerful, unreluctant giver. Judas understood none of this: "Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:4-6).

Remember Jesus's response? "Then said Jesus, 'Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.'" Our care for the needy must always prioritize caring for the needs of the Lord's work. This too is pure religion before our Heavenly Father.

Conclusion: Our passage concludes with the ancient equivalent of roadkill (v. 31). There is an obvious health concern being addressed here, but I think this issue is mentioned also because the Lord never wants us to use the equivalent of roadkill to care for the needs of others. He wants us instead to be generously gracious to the best of our ability, like He has been with us.

Jesus gave His all for us. Everything we have comes from Him. And then, like Pastor Wilcox declared so clearly, He even gave Himself. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Have you been made rich with the gifts of eternal life and forgiveness of sin? If so, let’s care for the needy with the generous graciousness of pure religion.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching