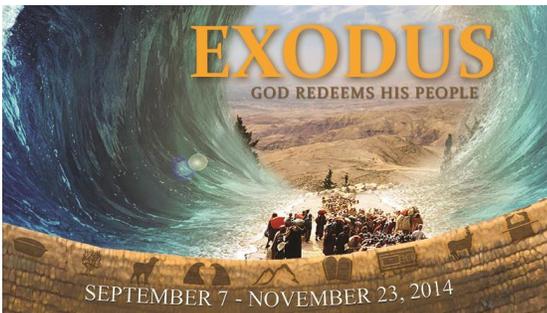


God Teaches Us to Walk in His Ways
Exodus 21:1-11; 21:22-27; 22:16-27; 23:1-9; 24:3-11
Fall Old Testament Sermon Series on Exodus
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
November 2, 2014

TEXTS: Exodus 21:1-11; 21:22-27; 22:16-27; 23:1-9; 24:3-11

This morning we continue in our fall series on the Book of Exodus. It's a good Sunday to be a lawyer. This week, in preparation for the sermon, I contacted all the lawyers I could think of at



Kenwood Baptist Church and solicited their information. I will share their insights as we proceed through this text. I've mentioned all through this fall much I love the book of Exodus. I love it for many, many significant reasons: The Exodus is the Gospel of the Old Testament; it is the center of gravity in the first five books of the Scripture; it reveals the identity and character of God; it also defines our identity as the people of God.

This morning, the scene continues at Mount Sinai. We learned last Sunday that redemption from Egypt leads to a covenant relationship with Almighty God, an exclusive, binding, legal relationship between God and His people, something unparalleled in ancient covenant making. Redemption leads to covenant to a sacred, binding agreement in love between God and His people. It is remarkable that as familiar as the Ten Commandments are to many people, the next chapter is wholly unfamiliar to most people. Very few refrigerator magnets have quotations from Exodus chapters 21, 22, or 23, and yet the scene is the scene of God in glory speaking from the mountain, revealing His will. This morning, as we look at how God continues to speak from the mountain, we see that, just as



behind each of the Ten Commandments is the character of God and the covenant-commitment of God, so the case laws in our Scripture reading this morning also teach us to think in God's ways and to walk in the pattern of His living. These chapters teach us how God thinks about the nitty-gritty, the specifics of living, how God wants His people to relate to social relationships, property transfer, conflict resolution, physical intimacy, work relationships, immigration, and the sanctity of human life. These are all real topics that deal with real life, and each of them is

to be an expression of the character of God lived out by faith because of God's covenant-commitment to you and to me.

I know that there are some lurking questions in your minds, and let me remove them, if I can, with a pastoral, surgical procedure at the beginning of the sermon. I want to pull out from your mind the question: "Which of these laws applies to me?" Pull that out of your mind, and instead, put in your mind: "How can this law be fulfilled in the specifics of my situation?" I want to pull out of your mind the question: "What is the least I can do to keep from breaking God's commands?" Instead, I want you to be thinking: "How can I maximize the glory of God in my obedience in this particular situation?" We need to be taught how to live as God's people in the world. Like me, many of you in this room are fathers, or parents. Aren't you glad that God does not adopt the parenting style of: "Figure it out!"? I'm so grateful for this, as that is really not a good parenting style, especially for all of us who have inherited Adam's sinful template. We figure out ways for our own advantage. What we figure out on our own is how to exploit people around us; what we figure out on our own is how to bring our lives into shipwreck. Instead, God teaches us how He wants us to live, and we praise Him for that. In modern societies, we have tended to adopt a stance towards law of an exhaustive law code that modern societies regulate or prohibit with separate laws. In the exhaustive law system, state or federal law codes run to thousands of pages and address thousands of individual actions, and in this approach to modern law, all actions are permitted that are not expressly forbidden. That is why criminals look for loopholes or gaps in the law. Everything that is not explicitly prohibited is allowed, and that explains why the constitution and by-laws of my mother's retirement community are longer than the Scripture that teaches us how to govern our whole lives.

If you're thinking this morning, "Wow, this is long and tedious," actually God is a master of brevity. He has covered all areas of life in just a few chapters, because God's laws are paradigmatic. That's a great difference between the law of our society and the laws of God. God's laws are paradigmatic; they give examples of behaviors in specific situations, and you are supposed to take the example situation and apply it to your own specifics. God's laws function in this way as paradigms, so you cannot avoid the law by appealing to an exception in your circumstance. For example, you cannot say the law says I must make restitution for a stolen ox or sheep, so because I stole your goat, I'm off the hook. You cannot say that the law says that anyone who attacks his father or mother shall be put to death, but I have attacked my grandmother, so this law does not apply to me. You cannot say that the law says certainly punishment applies for someone who hit someone with a fist or a stone, but I kicked my neighbor with my foot and hit him with a piece of wood, and so that law does not apply to me. It doesn't work like that. The laws of God are paradigms teaching us how to think and act, and

the point is to reflect His glory in the world.

So, now we are ready to dig into some nitty-gritty of living together as God's covenant people. I picked four blocks of Scripture, and it pains me that we can't look at all these in detail, but our goal this morning is to learn to think as God thinks. God speaks on the mountain, reveals His will, and then celebrates a covenant meal, and that's where we are headed this morning.

Let's look at the first block: **The treatment of workers, servants, and slaves** in Exodus 21:1-11. These are God's judgments, God's definitions of right and wrong. Would you believe, the first topic for a group of 600,000 recently rescued slaves is dealing with slavery and people who work for you? The terms slavery, slave, servant, or worker occur 1000 times in the Old Testament, and the case envisioned here is concerning what happens if one of your kinsmen, a Hebrew, happens to sell himself into slavery, often because they could not pay their debts. The first situation envisioned is what happens when you, the former slave, now become a slave owner, or you, the former worker, now become the boss. You've experienced this, and sometimes it's frightening when the worker becomes the boss. But God wants to clarify this immediately, and He says in Exodus 21:2:

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything."

There is a guaranteed limit on indentured slavery, and working to pay off a debt is cut off automatically after six years. The language that is used, "He will go out," or "He shall go free," is the same language that describes the Exodus itself. This person will experience his own miniature Exodus after six years. You all know that you were enslaved for 400 years, and God puts a limit on this. The parallel description of this situation in Deuteronomy is that not only does this person go out without having to pay, but you, as the boss, have to pay him! In Deuteronomy 15:12-13, the parallel case, we read:

"If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you."

Where would you get this idea? You'd get it by replaying the script of the Exodus. Remember that Israel leaves Exodus, and the Egyptians pay them as they leave. So, you are to relate to people who work for you in this same way. In God's great economy, there is no exploitation. You are to respect his marital status. If he comes in single, he goes out single; if he comes in married, his wife goes with him; if he has had a family while working for you and you have provided him with a wife, and he has a family now, then comes the situation that is

unimaginable in other ancient law codes: the situation were someone who works for you says, "I love working for you. You treat me so well, I want to keep working for you." In that situation, he has the freedom of going before God and getting his ear pierced as a sign that he is volunteering to work for this person. This is an unimaginable scenario, conceivable only with righteous living.

The second case is the case of a woman, and here again God reveals His heart and goes to great lengths to protect the rights of women. He says in Exodus 21:7:

"If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do."

We'll discover that the intention of a man's selling his daughter is for marriage. We have to keep reading to see it's not that she will never go free, but it's that she doesn't go free like the case of the man. In the case of the man, he has to wait six years, but if you mistreat the woman, she goes free immediately. In Exodus 21:8, we read:

"If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her."

Her life can be bought back by a family member. If he selects her for his son, instead of taking her as a wife for himself, then he must grant her the rights of a daughter. You cannot take a woman's life and exploit it. That's the point of these laws, and the Word of God teaches us, at the very beginning of the specific case laws of Exodus, the value of human life and the overturning of the Egyptian model of oppressive state slavery. Dr. Doug Stuart of Gordon-Conwell Seminary writes:

"Israel's service/slavery laws should be understood in terms of their own history of slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians made the Israelites slaves on the basis of their ethnicity, forced them to serve as slaves for life, did not compensate them properly, if at all, and worked them unbearably hard as a means of keeping them weak and/or causing at least some to die under the burden of their slavery.

"Against this sort of historical experience, the Bible's laws protect all sorts of workers, guaranteeing them the right to gain their freedom after a set period of time as against the Egyptian practice of permanently enslaving Israel. Biblical law allowed service out of love rather than out of necessity as opposed to involuntary service under oppressive masters in Egypt.

"Biblical law also gave immediate freedom to those who had in any way been physically abused as opposed to the severe abuse the Egyptians had imposed upon the Israelites. God's laws, then, provided a divinely enforced covenant protections for those who

worked for former slaves and made sure the former slaves did not return evil for evil once they had the opportunity to do so.

“God’s laws implicitly condemned the Egyptian treatment of the Israelites as illegal by prohibiting the very practices the Egyptians had used to suppress and weaken God’s people in Egypt.” *Exodus, 476*

God’s laws condemn the Egyptian model of state slavery as illegal and against His heart. There is no ancient law collection that deals with workers first except for the Bible because of Israel's historical experience.

Let’s go to the second block: **Bodily injury, compensation, restitution, and the sanctity of life** in Exodus 21:22-27. This block deals with what happens with bodily injuries. The Bible is very much aware of the distinction, a serious distinction, between murder and voluntary or involuntary manslaughter. The model is to compensate and give restitution for injury. I wish we had time to look at these in detail, but I want to focus on one of these specific cases. It's a case of two men who are fighting and slam into a pregnant woman. That's an out-of-control fight. This is a case of an obviously pregnant woman and two men who are brawling, and they slam into the pregnant woman. What about that situation, and what is the heart of God? Exodus 21:22 says, and I am paraphrasing: If two men are fighting and are dumb enough while they are fighting to hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely and that injury causes her to go into labor and there's a birth, but there is no serious injury, then the offender has to pay for either the medical costs or her time while she is recuperating. This is just like in the previous section, if you hit someone and they are injured, you have to pay for their time that they can't be working and pay for their medical costs. In this situation, what are the costs? It is the woman's husband who says what the cost is. But maybe the most interesting of all is if you were to slam into a pregnant woman and she does give birth and there's an injury. The word that's used here, *ason* in Hebrew, is used in the Bible only for when Jacob is fearful that his son Benjamin might die in his journey to Egypt. If the child in the womb is forced out and dies, what about that situation? Alone in the ancient world, we have a law that guards the sanctity of life in the womb. If the child in the womb is forced out by this brawl, then you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and hand for hand. This rhetorical formula, which we call the *lex talionis*, Latin for *the law of the tooth*, means that the punishment should fit the crime. Notice that the application of this is that the child in the womb is regarded as a full person, and there is no parallel law in antiquity to this. It is an astonishing statement of the heart of God. Again, we must hear this against the experience in the Exodus of the slaughter of the Israelite infants. It is no mistake that God jealously guards and seeks to protect life, even in the womb.

The third block that we read in Exodus 22:16-27 deals with: **Various forms of exploitation**

taking advantage of other people. The NIV translates Exodus 22:16:

“If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her,. . . “

The Hebrew very carefully expresses this in a way that is so appropriate. As we know, sometimes men, when they want to invite someone to be their sexual partner, give all kinds of promises, big promises, and then often fail to deliver on those promises. The Hebrew says of 22:16, if a man deceives a young woman and sleeps with her, the Scripture says that since he is acting like she is his wife, then he must treat her like she is his wife. The Bible has a remarkably high view of physical intimacy as a covenant sign, as an expression of marital relationship. It is the custom at this time if you are engaged to be married, then you pay the bride price. It is really like the lump sum that you give in valuing of this woman. It is sort of like that terrifying moment when a young man buys an engagement ring, and he says, “How much does the diamond ring cost?” Then, after a short pause, he asks: “How much was that cubic zirconium?” Then he has a moment of crisis and identity, and he thinks for a moment about his bride, and thinks, “Is she a cubic zirconium kind of gal?” And then he says, “No! No! I’ll take the real diamond!” If you sleep with someone, you must treat her like you’re married to her. That’s the Bible’s view. If this guy is such a loser that the dad says there is absolutely no way that you will marry his daughter, he still has to give her this valuation so that she is honored in the community. This is remarkable, the high view of women and protecting her rights and value. There are other examples of exploitation, like sorcery, exploiting religion for hire, guarding against bestiality, and the exploitation of animals. We read in Exodus 22:21: “Do not mistreat a foreigner or oppress him.” Why? “Because you were foreigners in Egypt.” Verse 22: “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan,” and notice, verse 23, “If you take advantage of the weak, the marginalized, the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, if you do that, God says, ‘They’re going to cry out to Me, and guess what? You all know that I’m the kind of God that hears when oppressed people cry out to Me, and I will hear their cry, and I will rescue them and I will bring judgment against you.’”

Notice that the shape of biblical ethics of living in terms of the Covenant is completely defined by the Exodus experience. Exodus 22:25 in the TNIV says:

“If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest.”

Do not exploit the poor. The word *mashek* in Hebrew really describes a front-end service fee. It’s like when you go to cash your check at one of those nonbanking institutions and there’s a big cut taken off the top. God says: “Do not do that. I don’t treat people in this way. I am compassionate.”

The fourth block is in Exodus 23:1-9: **Living by the truth and a surpassing righteousness.** It begins with living as people of the truth.

Exodus 23:1:

“Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.”

Exodus 23:2:

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.”

Isn't it true that sometimes the crowd can just flat-out be totally wrong? I love the statement of Athanasius in the fourth century. When people came to Athanasius, the leader of the church in North Africa, and they said: “Athanasius, Athanasius, the whole world is against you!” He replied: “Well, I guess then that I'm against the whole world.” Don't buckle under the crowd to do wrong; don't pervert justice by siding with the crowd; don't show favoritism for either the rich or the poor. Sometimes it can be a temptation to show favoritism toward the poor, and God wants truth and righteousness.

There's a radical portion of God's will in Exodus 23:4. Remember last Sunday when we all struggled to make sure we spotted the oxen and the donkeys that we were desirous of in our lives? God says in Exodus 23:4:

“If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him.”

Literally it means, if you find an ox or donkey of someone who hates you. It might not just be those foreign enemies, but it might be someone that you don't like, and you know doesn't like you. Guess what? According to God, you cannot leave it there; you have to act. You cannot change your behavior based on the person that you perceive to be the owner. The God of the Bible desires righteousness and holiness in the nitty-gritty of living. You cannot say I love Jesus on Sunday morning and walk out of this place and drive and spend and speak and act as though you have no covenant relationship to God, not in God's view. All Old Testament ethics flow out of the real experience of the Exodus. Do you see that? So, for us as Christians our living, our thinking, our valuing, our spending, our speaking, our relationships with other people, with those who work for us, our relationships and how we perceive our sexuality, are all governed by the fact that we've been claimed by Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean that if you fail in one step that you are condemned forever. God makes provision for forgiveness, but faithfulness is something that we desire and long to see. Do you see how “which of these relates to me” is totally the wrong question to ask? The question is: “How can these truths be fulfilled in the nitty-gritty specifics of my life?” I found it no accident, but a divine, sovereign correspondence, that my life this week had a 400% higher rate of nitty-gritty, practical interruptions this week. I finally

simply thought, "Okay, Lord, this is the nitty-gritty. What is Your will in this specific situation?" The great ending of the scene at Mount Sinai is a covenant meal, and in Exodus 24, the glory of God on the mountain, the glory of God speaking to the people ends with the people hearing God and responding in Exodus 24:3:

"Everything the LORD has said we will do."

Moses writes down what God had said, so among God's people there are the tablets of the 10 Commandments and the Book of the Covenant. The 10 Commandments get expressed in the nitty-gritty of the Book of the Covenant, and at the end of God's speaking and revealing His character and will, there is a covenant meal. In Exodus 24:4, we read:

"[Moses] got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel."

So, the people gather. Remember, there are two million people at the base of the mountain, and there are burnt offerings for forgiveness, and then there are fellowship offerings which are offered and they get to eat. The Book is read to the people, and the people respond: "We will do all that the Lord has said. We will obey." Then, Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel go up on the mountain and see the glory of God. We read in Exodus 24:10:

"[They] saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself."

In Exodus 24:11, we see:

"But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank."

They are forgiven, claimed. They see God and they eat and they drink with God, and the Covenant is ratified by both parties, and it is celebrated with a meal.

Communion:

The best ending of every sermon is communion. You can come to communion from 1000 different directions, and this morning I want to come to communion from a different angle than I've ever come before. Most of the time, we come to communion, and we think of what God has done for us. That is all true, but this morning, because of Exodus 24, I want you to weigh your side of the covenant meal. You cannot partake of the covenant meal in Exodus 24 without pledging yourself to God in return. This morning, I want you to weigh in the counsel of your own heart a new resolve to say: "Lord, I don't want the bare minimum version of Christianity. I

want to pursue the maximization of Your glory in my life. I want to submit to Your vantage point on every aspect of my life. The burnt offering has been offered in Christ. Forgiveness is available for all who believe, but the Covenant meal also has a fellowship offering. The fellowship offering is for all of us who say: "Lord, I want to learn Your ways, I want to do what You said." I want you to partake of the Lord's supper this morning from this angle, from the angle of the Lord Jesus who told us: "This is My body, given for you. Do this." I have the words *Do this* in bold. "**Do this** in remembrance of Me." Jesus, who took the cup of the New Covenant, said: "This is the cup in My blood, poured out for you. **Do this** in remembrance of Me."

As we prepare to celebrate this Covenant Meal, this is not the table of Kenwood Baptist Church. This is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has come to us in covenant. As you partake today, I want you to hear our side of the equation, which is: "All that the Lord has said, we will do." As you partake of the broken body and shed blood, I want you to do that in the renewal of your own commitment to strive to live as God's people in the world, and I put myself in that group. Let us pray.

O, Lord God, Your Word is rich and You think differently than we do, and so we need Your Word. Lord, we need Your Word in the very specifics of the nitty-gritty of living, in the practicalities of our relationships with each other, in the resolution of conflict, in how we see intimacy, in how we relate, and in how we speak the truth. Thank You that You are a God who rules even over the specifics. Lord, as we prepare now to come and partake of this Covenant Meal, help each one of us, Lord, just as Your Word in this section throughout is expressed in the second person singular to each heart, Lord, I pray that You would stir in each heart here, my own included, to resolve to walk in Your ways, to try to maximize Your glory in every situation we are in. We ask for Your help and Your forgiveness, even now.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.