

Leviticus 24:10 - 25:55

Living in the Land

Intro

If we live with God - does that way of living stop when we step out our front door...

Is being a christian just about prayer and fasting, reading our bible, going to divine worship - and then going out into the world and living in such a way, that no one could notice we're Christians...

Or does God have something to say about how we run our business... what we do with our money, how we treat our neighbours and colleagues...

Does God have anything to say about how we treat our pets, do our gardening, and look after our community...?

What about social justice... does God have anything to say about what we should do with people less fortunate than ourselves, whether they are in that situation by the force of others, or their own foolishness ... are their problems - **really** my problems...?

The world would tell us - only today is a certainty...there is only today - the only thing that is real and certain is what you have in your hand today... If that is true then we are told we better do our best to hold onto

what we have... because it's dog eat dog, we can't afford to be too concerned about other peoples problems, otherwise it might be me in that situation tomorrow...

But Jesus opens up to us a greater reality! ... the resurrection!

Because the tomb is empty - everything changes!

We are free to let go of what is in our hand today, because we **know** that Jesus has something far greater for our tomorrows...

We don't need to grab, and grasp, and fight, and cling on to make sure we are able to keep living...

Because Jesus has fought and died, and risen - to give you all of His life! All that He is - and all that He has!

And so - living with God - being filled with His life, and following in His way - **fundamentally** changes how we live with each **other**...

Where does real social justice come from?

Leviticus Chs 24 and 25 are really all about this idea of - what we call - social justice... how do we pursue justice in our communities, how do we live in a way that is fair... well - more than fair - loving - to the people around us...

Social justice is a big topic at the moment, and maybe you're wondering - what is Doug going to say this morning, is he going to be 'woke', or 'anti-woke'...

And so the first thing I want to say is - put those categories right out of your mind... because the truth is - the whole movement doesn't have a clue what **real** social justice looks like...

We're not here this morning to see which side of the aisle the bible falls on, the Word of God stands alone, it doesn't take sides, we simply listen to Him - and follow what he says - no matter the consequences...

And what we will see is that the bible's view of social justice - is higher, better and fuller than any political movement of man...

Because true social justice stems from the Living God...

If we took an honest look at the reasons that people want to pursue social justice today, we would find lots of different answers - charity, pity, **guilt**... virtue signalling, advertising - selling a product...

Justice that is built on these foundations - is no justice at all...

So where does genuine social justice stem from? Social justice begins with the name of the LORD!

Honour for **His** name will bring us to the **REAL** root and foundation of all **REAL** social justice!

Because... If we honour **HIM** - we will care about what **HE** cares about! ... We will love what **HE** loves! And what does He love... People!

We will only truly care about justice and people, when we love and honour the name of God...

You see real social transformation will never come from external pressure, but only ever from inner change..

The world's efforts at bringing peace and justice, political campaigns, charitable giving, fundraising, protesting... none of it will truly work...

It *might* bring small amounts of respite for a while in individual cases, and we can be thankful for those small doses of justice... but it will never **truly** sort out the problem,

So while we may from time to time support some of these individual causes, what we **REALLY** want to be putting our hearts and efforts into - is church!

Church is the only place that Jesus is at work, saving people, washing people, changing people, showing us how to live real human lives...

Church is where Jesus' name is honoured, and we learn to love **His** priorities...

Blasphemy (24:10-23)

And so when the LORD begins to talk about social justice, he starts by talking about blasphemy...

v16 - *'Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death...'*... wow...! Why is blasphemy taken so seriously in the book of Leviticus?

People today say blasphemy is bad, because it offends people. It offends peoples beliefs.

Actually Leviticus is not coming from that angle at all. Its not about offending peoples beliefs, it's that it's against God! Against HIM!

You see - the word blaspheme is a translation of the word 'naqab' which literally means 'to pierce' with the intent of debilitating a person.

The second term used in v15 - rendered as 'curse', to curse the name - actually means to declare someone to be 'empty' or without significance or power...

So the guilty person here tried to damage the Name, and say it was insignificant...

But what's the issue...? Its just a name right...?

Wrong - its not just **A** name... it is **THE** Name

*'Whoever blasphemes **the name**'*

What is 'The Name'?

What is **THE** Name of the Lord...

In Genesis 4:26 we read that when people started turning to God, they started by calling upon **the name**... So - the name is the way we come to God...

When Moses wanted to experience something of the **glory** of the Lord, what does the Lord do? ... he proclaims His **name** to Moses... *"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."*

The Name of the Lord is His glory - it is all that he is, and all He has done...

And so the Name of the Lord is tied up with the Second person of the Trinity, the Angel of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

This becomes really clear in Acts 5 when the Sanhedrin arrests the apostles.

They arrest the apostles, flog them, order them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

And as the apostles leave the court - they rejoice! Because they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for **the name** and so *'every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is **Jesus**.'*

The apostles equate **the Name** of the LORD, with Jesus!

Jesus **is** the name of the Lord!

He is the way we come to God, He is the one who is everything that God is, He is the one who is the Glory of God! He is the one - **the name** - that people call out to when they seek God!

So, when this man in Leviticus 24 rejected the Name of the Lord as something worthless, it was a very serious matter.

He was rejecting, cursing - **piercing** ... Jesus ... claiming Jesus to be empty and without significance...

You see the issue of blasphemey is not that someone says OMG, or uses Jesus name inappropriately ... blasphemy is a deep rejection of all that God is ... a rejection of Jesus...

And so when we understand **that**, the punishment in the OT Church makes sense... *'Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death.'*...

In the following verses - (17-22), the Lord explains that crimes against each other must be punished in proper measure. The punishment must fit the crime ... but should not be **more** than the crime - so its an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth etc.

But the blasphemer was to be stoned to death, the same punishment that was reserved for those who sacrifice children...

Now, if the Lord is careful to limit the punishment of sins to the measure of the crime, what does the punishment of blasphemy, tell us about the severity of blasphemy?

It tells us that if someone rejects Jesus ... then they ...are rejecting life - and there is no life for them...

If you reject Jesus - there is no place for you in the presence of the Living God, there is no life - or Hope for you ... its really serious news...

We can decide to be shocked, or even *offended* by what God says about blasphemy... or we can humbly take it as a warning... if we reject all that God is - that is Jesus... then there is **nowhere** for us to be safe before God...

Jesus - His name! - is the only way to be safe before the living God! cry out to Him! Call upon His name - don't reject it! Call upon His name and you will be saved!

If we want to begin to truly understand justice and compassion, If we want to be a community of love and justice... then we **must** begin with a radical appreciation of the Living God: If we fail to respect and honour the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we have missed the 'engine' in our social compassion.

The Sabbath year (25:1-7)

After addressing the need to honour the name of the LORD, The LORD speaks about how weak are to treat the earth, before he speaks about how we are to treat people...

Leviticus 25:2-4

- *'When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a **Sabbath of solemn rest for the land**, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.'*

The OT church are told they must look after the earth, and give it rest...

Its not there for us to use and abuse and get whatever we want from it, we must honour the LORD - and love other people, by caring for the earth...

We have seen time and again that Leviticus is concerned with the whole of life - and so the earth is part of that.

We have done some serious damage to the earth over the years - and the earth needs rest... rest from our digging and taking nutrients out of it.

Romans 8 tells us that creation is groaning... because '*the creation was **subjected** to futility, **not willingly**, but because of him who subjected it*'... that was us! Humanity! We subjected the earth to futility when we sinned, and turned away from God!

We were supposed to be it's guardian, but instead we have become SO individualistic, that we never think of God, we never think of others, we only ever think of ourselves... what we need, and what we can get...

We haven't even got the sensible self-preserving instinct to look after the earth! The thing that God uses to give us food, and fuel, and shelter...!

And so it is **good** that there is a conscience and an awareness about care for the earth at ...the moment ...but we need to move **beyond** virtue signalling, care for the earth is much deeper than simply using paper straws - and other ridiculous things that make us feel like we're doing something - but that actually do more harm than good...

So where does the church of there LORD stand in regard to all this...? Well - God has something to say about it! And this is important!

Because I know *personally* it is something I can be quite dismissive of, mainly because of all the useless virtue signalling causes that dominate this conversation... but actually - God **has** called us to care for His earth, not necessarily to swallow the ideas of climate change and the green agenda but to care for **His creation**...

Sometimes christians have taken the attitude that - if Jesus is coming back - and everything is going to be burned up and made new when He does - well - what does any of it matter...?

Jesus will sort it all out when he comes, so why bother now... but imagine if we took that approach to sin... 'just keep sinning - Jesus will sort it all out when he comes...' No!

Of course He will finally deal with all sin and evil when he returns...but we want to see an end of sin in our own lives today don't we?! Because that is Gods agenda...and so in the same way - we want to see the earth creed for **today**, because that is also Gods agenda...

In fact - it is precisely **because** Jesus is coming back, that we want to take care of the earth! Because we will live on **this** earth made new, we don't live as though we're done with it!

We want to learn how to be truly human TODAY - living the life of heaven - now... and so we want to be asking ourselves - 'how am I going to live in the new creation...? Well I want to live that way TODAY!' I want to live with eternal priorities - today!

In the new creation we will be in a holistic relationship with the whole creation, living and working in harmony with it, and so - I think its part of our testimony to live in harmony with it now...

These principles in Leviticus about giving the land rest should be part of our attitude, so we do recycle, we do, do our bit at minimising our negative impact on the earth - we want to give it rest!

This isn't about petitions, campaigns and posturing - its about real life - caring for the earth around you, nurturing your garden, picking litter in your community, planting trees, looking after animals in your care...

Why - because its Jesus' earth, He's coming back to it, He is going to make it new, and we want to be part of all that **He** does!

And we care for the earth - because we care for other people, the earth is not ours - it's the LORDs, and we share it with other people... they need it too...

The year of Jubilee (25:8-55)

And so we come to this final section - the year of Jubilee... 25:10 *'And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan.'* Every 50 years was a year of Jubilee... The key feature of the Jubilee year was the return of land to its original owners.

Because the land belonged to the Lord Himself, His 'tenants' - us - should never view the land as their permanent possession.

The OT church was always to live with the understanding that everything they have, is not theirs... it's the LORDs... He has given it to them, and so we don't hold on tight to stuff - thinking it's ours forever - instead we're just waiting to give it back to the LORD - by giving to others - **especially** to others in need...

The Lord tells them they each had an obligation to financially support anybody in church who had become poor vv 35-43.

Any money that is lent in church must be interest free and all goods must be sold at cost—never for any profit.

And again the reason for this is: The reason for this - given in v38 - because the Lord God redeemed them from Egypt and gave them this whole land ... for free! How wicked would it be to now try and turn a profit from other, on what the LORD has given you for free!

Falling into debt was as big a problem in the ancient world as it is today.

In the modern world we tend to destroy a man and his family by throwing him into prison when he gets into very serious debt. But ancient Israel realised that such cruelty does no-one any good...

It doesn't help the person who is owed money, because they don't get any money back while a person is locked away, and it doesn't do the prisoner any good because he has lost his family and can't actually begin the rebuilding process.

Therefore, in ancient Israel a man in such serious debt could become the 'slave' of the person he owed money to. That way he could remain with his family and actually **work hard** to pay off the debt.

The evils of the racial slave trade of recent centuries can make it hard for us to engage with aspects of this teaching,

But this form of 'slavery' in the OT church - is a far cry from the evils of the slave trade...

This was a way for a man to voluntarily work off His debt, and keep his family... it was just - and it was kind...

However, such a system of debt management had to be protected from abuse. Just because the man was in such poverty did not mean that he could be treated badly or disrespected.

So in verses 39-43 the Lord makes it clear that the man and his family are to be given full liberty in the Year of Jubilee!

And again - the reason is given vv42-43, Israel is reminded that they were redeemed from Egyptian slavery by the Lord God and they are all now His people... We are all indebted to God - and so they are to forgive each others debts, as God has forgiven our debts...

What the LORD is showing us here as we think about social justice - is that we are a community shaped and defined by what Jesus has done for us...

Everything we do, every decision we make, from what we do with our land and money to how we treat other people - **must** be shaped by what the LORD has done for us!

As Church people - living with God - we must find it **impossible** to treat others badly! How can we - when we have been treated so well by God!

How can we withhold our money, our homes, our businesses, our time, our **lives** from other people... when all of it has been given to you by the LORD God! It would be wrong to keep it to yourself!

How do we apply the year of jubilee today?

So how are we to apply the year of Jubilee today...? Are we meant to move back to our family homes every 50 years? What about slaves? We don't have those - who should we be freeing...? How can we embody the spirit of Jubilee in church life...

Well - if the Sabbath year - this rest for the earth is meant to remind us of the new creation, then the year of jubilee was a picture of when Jesus returns and resets everything!

Debts are forgiven, slaves are freed - in fact more than that - ! In the Jubilee - it was more than just forgiving debts, they received their inheritance back!

When the LORD returns - even though we - like the prodigal son - have squandered **all our** inheritance, turned away from God, sinned against each other, and ruined the earth... yet...Jesus will come - and share **his** inheritance with us! He will give us back all that we have lost - and more! As he re-makes creation - and un-does all of our mess!

But the year of Jubilee doesn't just point us to the future, it offers us a better **today**...

In the year of Jubilee everyone was given a fresh start... bad decisions were un-done - and they are given a life to live again...

Have you ever wanted a new start? Have you ever just thought - "I wish all my mistakes could be washed away, I wish someone would just give me a chance... I wish someone would **help** me - and show me how to live, help me to make good decisions, and not mess up my life and my family..."

wel... Jesus is that person... that is exactly what Jesus does for us - when we become a Christian!

When we trust Him, repent of our sins - turn away from trying to do life our own way, and obey him ... then He gives us a fresh start... not just once - but every day...

Every night we get to lay our head down on the pillow and say - Sorry... sorry for my sin - and my foolishness to today Lord - forgive me... and He does...

And then every morning - we get to wake up and say - Help... Help me today LORD - I can't do today by myself - Show me your way... walk with me... Help... and He does...!

Today - Jesus is offering you a fresh start! All you have to do is say sorry - ask for his forgiveness, ask for His help - and it's yours...

Get stuck into church life - read the bible - obey what he says - and you will find your life begins to make sense!

So the year of jubilee is this amazing celebration - this picture of when the Lord returns. How can church maintain the spirit of Jubilee?

In light of the day when Jesus will come to set us all free - The church all around the world, and through the ages - has put its energy into getting people an experience of freedom now...

For instance in the first century, in the time of the apostles - the biggest item on the budget of local churches was money to free slaves.

The second biggest item was providing for orphans... why? Because they had the spirit of Jubilee...

Like in Acts 4: *' they were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ...There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.'*

Jesus had set them free in their hearts to be generous, to give away *whatever* they could - and the church carried on doing that - and so when people saw them .. they saw real humanity!

People would look in on the life of the church - and see a radically different kind of humanity! The new humanity in Jesus! A humanity that believes in setting people free, and forgiveness, and justice, and compassion, and dignity for human beings...

What are **we** going to do - to give people an experience of freedom today - how are we going to show how the gospel **really** does free us, really **has** changed us, and that Jesus really **is** coming back to set everything right...

What are people around us enslaved to? How can we free them? Our friends and neighbours... how can we love them - and **show** them the gospel by giving them an experience of freedom...

How can we set people free from debt? Are there people in our local church who are enslaved by debt? What can be done to set them free?

Its not just freedom from debt or poverty that people need... maybe its freedom from depression, alcoholism, addiction, pornography, abuse, loneliness..

Maybe it's freedom from judgment, freedom to be honest about mistakes, to be vulnerable and ask for help, without being judged...the freedom of forgiveness...

How can we serve the people around us and really **show** them - not just **tell** them - about the freedom that only Jesus brings....?

Only the church can bring such freedom, only a people obsessed with honouring His name, only a people who share God's holy desire for his people!

It is the churches job to bring freedom, not some para-church organisation, not some political movement that the church joins, but local churches - at the coal face, reaching out to the people around them...

Conclusion

Mission is not **just** about proclaiming the good news - it is **being** the good news - **living** the good news.

We can mock and poke holes in the saying: 'preach the gospel - if necessary - use words...' Of course it is necessary to use words - to speak **The Name**... But don't for one moment think the gospel is **only** words...

If your the message you speak with you words, is not shown to be alive in your actions - no one will care about your words!

What good is living with God - if the life that we live is the same, miserable, dog eat dog, look after number one - trudge - as everyone else...

People are to look at the church and see a fundamentally, radically different kind of corporate life ... and want in!

Jesus is risen, you are paid for, you are immortal now, and it won't be long anyway ...Live as though that is true!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit - Amen