

Delivered – Justice and Mercy

3.22.26

Exodus 23:1–9

Sunday AM

When I first bought my truck, I wasn't that impressed w/ all the new safety features – lane assist, collision warning, etc. In fact, I found it annoying b/c every time I drifted a little, the truck would beep at me. If I got too close, it'd flash warnings. After a while, I found myself thinking – *this car is judging me*. It felt a bit intrusive. But then one day, while driving to Franklin, a warning went off that might've saved my life b/c it caught my attention when I was distracted. And in that moment, I realized that these features weren't there to control me – but protect me. Such is the case w/ the 10 Commandments. They weren't given as a divine interruption to our lives, but a God-given protection to keep us from drifting into disaster. They're a gift.

Truth – there are few gifts that are more misjudged than the 10 commandments. Many people think of them as restriction, limitation, or divine prohibitions – yet in actuality, they're more like guardrails to protect us. They expose sin, restrain evil, and establish boundaries. They define right from wrong – good from evil – and what is needed to live before a holy God.

They show us that worship matters, truth matters, life matters, marriage matters, integrity matters – and that our relationships w/ God and others matters. They don't just regulate behavior – they reflect the very character of God.

Truth is – no society can survive when truth collapses, when personal choice replaces fairness, when the weak are exploited, when the crowd determines morality, or when the strong can manipulate the whole – b/c iff truth, justice, and accountability get removed, the whole structure of society will fail.

This is what's happening in **Exodus 21-23**. God is filling in the details of the 10 commandments to provide application to the broader guardrails. Think of each of these rules as fitting into the larger bucket of one of the initial 10. Let's read **Exodus 23:1-9**.

Don't spread false reports. don't help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. Don't follow the crowd in doing evil. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, don't pervert justice by siding w/ the crowd, and don't show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit. If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, don't leave it there; be sure you help them w/ it. Don't deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuit. Have nothing to do w/ a false charge and don't put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Don't accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. Don't oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, b/c you were foreigners in Egypt. Exodus 23:1-9

When we come to **Exodus 23:1–9**, we find that God is expounding on the 9th Commandment – *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

IOW – our words are to be about ¹truthfulness in speech, ²courage in the face of public pressure, ³mercy toward others, and ⁴justice for the vulnerable.

I Be **HONEST** w/ Your Words

Don't spread false reports. don't help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.

false report (*shema shav*) means a report of emptiness – that is a report that's deceptive or untrue.

malicious witness – a person whose words are a form of violence – a witness whose words are a weapon.

IOW – slander isn't merely careless speech. It's a form of weaponized injustice that seeks to bring harm.

God is warning His people not only against inventing lies but against helping empty accusations travel.

The 9th commandment requires more than simply refusing to lie; it requires us to promote the truth and to protect our neighbor's reputation. Ryken

God's people are never to **invent** lies, **repeat** lies, **receive** lies, or **help** lies travel further.

The command is sweeping. It applies wherever lies travel and wherever words are used to damage others.

WHY – it's b/c false reports destroy community life b/c they break down trust b/w neighbors.

This is exactly what occurs when rumors spread. False reports damage reputations, poison trust, and destroy the innocent b/c rumors are like a raging wildfire – they travel faster than they can be extinguished.

If social media had existed in the OT, this verse might've read like this – *You shall not share, repost, forward, retweet, or comment on a false report.*

II Be **UNWAVERING** in Your Convictions

LBH – we're all deeply susceptible to the pressure of the majority. But God says His people must never allow the crowd to become their moral compass.

Candid Camera conducted a social experiment in an elevator. (5) people were placed inside and asked to face the back wall instead of the door. As a person stepped onto the lift, they were greeted w/ everyone staring at the back wall. At first, the new passenger would look confused. They'd glance at the door and then at the people – and w/in seconds, something fascinating would occur – 90% of them would turn around and face the back wall too b/c they assumed that since everyone else was doing it – it must be right.

This experiment is a classic illustration of **social conformity** – where people often adjust their behavior to match the group, even when the behavior seems irrational or unnecessary. ***It turns out we're often more comfortable being wrong w/ the crowd than being right alone.*** Apparently if enough people stare at a wall, eventually the rest of us will stare at it too.

Sadly, ***most people have been conditioned to follow the crowd more than to follow the truth.*** And this is exactly why God says what He said in **Exodus 23:2**.

Don't follow the crowd in doing evil.

The Hebrew word for **crowd** means the **many** or **majority**. God is warning His people to not allow the pressure of the masses to determine what is right.

SEE – Truth is **NOT** determined by popularity or consensus b/c while a crowd of sinful, fallen people can normalize evil, ***they can never sanctify it.***

Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it. Spurgeon

Truth – the majority is not always right – and God's people must be willing to stand for the truth even when everyone else is going the other way. Just b/c the world says abortion, adultery, and homosexuality are right and acceptable doesn't make them right – in fact, Scripture says differently – we can't go w/ the crowd.

When the crowd moves, check your compass – b/c God never called you to follow the many – but only to follow Him. We answer to an audience of One.

Never let the pressure of the majority shape your convictions or sense of truth – choose what is right in God's eyes, even if you have to stand alone.

III Show **MERCY** in Your Actions

In verses 4-5 the passage takes a remarkable turn as God commands just kindness toward our enemies.

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If the donkey of someone who hates you collapses under its burden, you must stop and help. v. 4-5

LBH – it's easy to help a friend. But God intentionally calls us to help our enemies too. If our enemy's animal wanders away, we don't get to look the other way – we have to fetch it and return it.

Did you see it? In vs. 4-5 – the Scripture became very personal teaching us that righteousness isn't refusing to do harm – **righteousness is choosing to do good.**

These commands anticipate what Jesus would later teach in the Sermon on the Mount when He called us ***to love our enemies and to do right by all people.***

IV Offer **JUSTICE** to the Vulnerable

Don't deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuit. Have nothing to do w/ a false charge and don't put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Don't accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. Don't oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners...

In v. 6, the focus shifts to the essential need for justice w/in the 9th commandment. The Hebrew word **mishpat** – means to render a verdict of right judgment.

This means biblical justice isn't about punishment – but about the relentless pursuit of moral order so that truth and righteousness prevail.

It's seeking what is right and due according to God's holy, righteous standard – ¹protecting the innocent, ²confronting wrongdoing, and ³ensuring fairness w/out partiality. It's doing what's right in the eyes of God, regardless of pressure, position, or personal cost.

Such justice is impartial b/c truth is impartial. It's neither sentimental favoritism nor cold neglect – but righteous impartiality. Nor is it showing favoritism toward the rich or the poor. Justice is impartial truth.

Justice must never be determined by wealth, status, or sympathy, but only by the truth. Ryken

Bottom line – we're called to show gracious justice to anyone and everyone built solely on the truth.

Centuries later the prophet Micah would summarize this same moral vision. In Micah 6:8 we read:

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly w/ your God.

God's law doesn't just tell us how to live; it reveals how far we've fallen and how urgently we need Him.

If we're being honest, this text doesn't just instruct us – *it exposes us*. After all, we've not always told the truth or verified every detail. We've followed the crowd when it was easier than standing alone. And we've withheld mercy from those who opposed us.

All to say – we've all missed the mark of perfection b/c we're all imperfect, bankrupt sinners in need of God's intervention – we need a Savior. And only Jesus is that faithful witness who never spread falsehood never bowed to the crowd, never distorted justice – but loved His enemies and defended the vulnerable.

Ironically, the greatest miscarriage of justice in history occurred when Jesus was falsely accused, maliciously condemned, and handed over to death. When false witnesses rose against Him and public pressure twisted the law – and crowd shouted for His execution.

And yet in this great injustice God accomplished the greatest act of justice/mercy the world has ever known. For at the cross, Jesus didn't just suffer injustice – He stood in our place.

Do you realize that every lie, every compromise, every failure of mercy and justice was laid on Him so that we could be forgiven and made right w/ God?

So, at the cross, justice and mercy met. Our guilt wasn't ignored – but rightly judged – thru the nail scarred hands and pieced side of Jesus.

The gospel is this – we're more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we're more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. Keller

Anyone who has received this grace is now called to live w/ a higher purpose. We called to live w/ truth in our words, mercy in our actions, and justice for the vulnerable – b/c we belong to the God of justice, grace, mercy, and unconditional love.

The question isn't whether we agree w/ God's law – but whether we've run to the Savior it reveals.