

Exodus 20:22-23:19 // How (Not) to Cook a Goat

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Rob Cardew

[0 : 00] This evening's Bible reading is in Exodus, and we're taking two different parts of Scripture. So we're starting at chapter 20, verse 22, through to chapter 21, verse 19, and this is on page 78 of the Church Bibles.

We'll then jump up to chapter 23, verses 1 to 19. So starting at chapter 20, verse 22.

Then the Lord said to Moses, These are the laws you are to set before them.

If you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free without paying anything. If he comes alone, he is to go free alone. But if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him.

If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. But if the servant declares, I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free, then his master must take him before the judges.

[1 : 39] He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life. If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as male servants do.

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. If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing, and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these things, she is to go free without any payment of money. Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be boot to death. However, if it is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen, they are to flee to a place I will designate. But if anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and boot to death. Anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be boot to death. Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be boot to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession.

[2 : 47] Anyone who curses their mother or father is to be boot to death. If people quarrel and one person hits another with a stone or with their fist and the victim does not die but is confined to bed, the one who struck the blow will not be held liable if the other can get up and walk around outside with a staff.

However, the guilty party must pay the injured person for any loss of time and see that the victim is completely healed. Now moving to chapter 23, starting at verse 1, which is on page 81 of your church Bibles.

Chapter 23, verse 1. Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.

And do not 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, do not leave it there.

Be sure you help them with it. Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not boot an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

[4 : 01] Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twist the words of the innocent. Do not oppress a foreigner, for you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you are foreigners in Egypt.

For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops. But during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left.

Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do your work, but on the seventh do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.

Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods. Do not let them be heard on your lips. Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me.

Celebrate the festival of unleavened bread for seven days. Eat bread made without yeast as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

[5 : 05] No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the festival of harvest with the first fruits of your crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.

Three times a year all the men are to appear before the sovereign Lord. Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me, along with anything containing yeast. The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning.

Bring the best of the first fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. Thank you. Thank you. Well, thank you for letting me be with you this evening, and spending this time in God's Word.

I should apologize that I lost my voice during the week, so hopefully that won't be too distracting.

Robbie, your staff is here. Let's pray and ask for God's help.

Father, thank you for the blessing of your Word. We pray that you would help us to hear you speak through your Word. We pray that you would be at work in our hearts.

[6 : 29] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, you are part of a community living in the desert. As a community, you're traveling through the wilderness of Sinai.

You're being led by a man who's over 80 years old called Moses. He carries with him a big stick. And he spends time going up a mountain to speak with the creator of the universe.

Is that from outside? Is that from outside? Seriously? Okay. Sure. Fine.

We'll press on. So, you're living in this community, and it's a really interesting time to be alive. I mean, here you are in this wilderness, traveling, trying to trust that you're being led to this land that you've been told about.

And one day, as the sun is going down, you've made a campfire, you and the boys, and you're warming your hands on it, and there's a pot hanging over the fire, and you start to hear that the young goat that you're cooking is starting to boil.

[7 : 51] But then, old man Moses, he runs towards you with his big stick, and he starts to hit the fire and put it out. A bit like Frodo in Lord of the Rings.

Put it out, you fools! And so you're like, what are you doing, Moses? And he turns to you and he says, Exodus chapter 23, verse 19.

You never, never cook a goat in its mother's milk. Who knew? This wilderness community, they're going to have to get used to doing pretty much everything differently, because God has set them apart to be different, to live differently by different laws.

Because God, he's taking these people, and he's turning them into his people, people of his kingdom. And the way God does this, is by applying his word to their lives.

By applying his word to their community. And that's what's happening in this passage. I know it seems like a bit of an odd passage at first, but there's a simplicity to this.

[9 : 16] God is applying the Ten Commandments to the community Moses is living in. So if you were here last week, you'll remember how God calls Moses up to Mount Sinai.

And on that mountain, God speaks the Ten Words, what we know as the Ten Commandments. And the Ten Commandments are like foundational principles for the community of God's people, of God's kingdom.

And we're very used to seeing this kind of thing in companies and organizations all the time. So a foundational principle might be teamwork. A company wants to build their company on the foundational principle of teamwork.

Now, it's all very well saying that, but what does that actually look like in reality? If on Monday morning, you went into that company's offices, what would you find?

What would you find if you went in there? Would you find a community that are working in unity towards a common goal? Or would you actually find a bunch of selfish, competitive individuals?

[10:39] Well, it would depend, wouldn't it, whether or not the foundational principle of teamwork had been applied to the community. It's not enough to just simply have them.

They have to be applied. And that's what God does in this passage that was read out. God had spoke His Ten Words.

God had spoke the Ten Commandments. And now He applies them to the community Moses is living in. And He does that. So they will start living as people of God's kingdom.

And if you spent time in that community, we would want to be able to find God's word at work in that people.

Now, as we look at this passage in front of us, we need to remember this is not an exact picture of what a church community like St. Silas is going to look like today.

[11:43] Today, we don't have the same ceremonial laws or the same judicial laws. But we both share the same underlying foundational principles, which are the Ten Commandments.

So that means we should be able to look at this passage, this community, and recognize things about our own church community today.

Does that make sense? So when we look at this community, we should see things that we will find in us. And I'm going to draw out three things that I think we should find in any church community where the Ten Commandments are applied.

love, justice, and rest. Love expressed in worship of God. A love for each other expressed in a commitment to justice.

And finally, a people who are learning to rest. Love, justice, and rest. So let's start by thinking about love. When God's word is applied to a community, you will find a people who love God.

[13:00] And throughout the Bible, that love is expressed through worship. Our passage, it's a big passage, but there is some shape, there is some structure, and it starts and ends with laws about loving God through worship.

And the final verse that was read out about how not to boil a goat, is actually part of a section about worship. This goat is prepared to be given as an offering to God.

And with every offering, the most important thing is always the heart posture towards God as the offering is made.

And so, the way the offering is prepared is like an outward expression of the heart posture.

If you're still there at the end of the passage, look to the start of verse 19. Bring the best of the first fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.

[14:13] Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. Now, if you think about the first half of that verse, only a heart that is really devoted to God, full of love of God, totally dependent on God, would lead to the outward expression of offering the best of the very first of your crops that you're growing.

So I think preparing a young goat in the milk, it was meant to feed from its mother. I mean, that doesn't seem like an outward expression of love for anything.

But perhaps as they were preparing this goat as an offering, they wasn't just thinking about giving it to God. Maybe they were actually thinking, you know, if we boil it in this milk, maybe it would actually taste better and, you know, we can take a few pieces for our supper.

It's not totally clear, is it? But it is in this section about worshipping God. And like I say, it's at the end of the passage and at the start.

So let's just turn back, turn back with me to the start of the passage. Chapter 20 from verse 22. So the first section, chapter 20, verse 22 to 26.

[15:41] And what we notice in this first section about worshipping God is how specific God is. God is very specific about what it means to express our love for him in worship.

And he needs to be specific, doesn't he? Because when you think about it, pretty much every kind of religious community in the world today will claim that love, in some sense, is one of their foundational principles.

And they'll also claim love of God. Some kind of God. love of God. There's people, not just of different pagan religions, but some people in, you know, that call themselves Christians, they will claim, well, all religions love God, but just by a different name.

But that reduces love to be something that's very distant, very cold. Love becomes devoid of any personal relationship where you actually know the person that you are loving and worshipping. The love that you express through worship has no actual specific terminus. Who or what are we actually worshipping? Whereas if you look at the start of this passage, the love we have for God is deeply personal and very specific.

[17:14] even the fact that God is speaking to Moses reveals the personal relationship that God has to his people.

Look at verse 22. Then the Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites this, you have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven.

they've seen God do all kinds of miracles to save them from slavery in Egypt.

When Moses went up the mountain and God spoke the Ten Commandments, the people at the bottom, they witnessed this through thunder and clouds of smoke.

God has revealed himself to this community of people. He's called them to be his people. And now he says, verse 23, do not make any gods to be alongside me.

[18:13] Do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. And it's important to notice there the words make for yourself. It's not that other religions simply love the same God by a different name.

They have made for themselves an object. They have manufactured something. Their worship simply expresses their love for what they have made themselves.

And so what is it but simply the love of the self? But in a community where the Ten Commandments are applied, we find a people who specifically love the one true God of the Bible.

and they love him in a specific way. Look to verse 24. Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle.

Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. So these things might seem a bit odd to us today, sitting here in Glasgow.

[19:28] but these are elements of what it means to be a people back then bound by a covenant. Way back in Genesis we read how God made a covenant with Abraham.

God promised that through Abraham's descendants there would be a people who would receive his blessings. And as we read through the book of Exodus, it looks like these are those people.

people. It looks like this is the community where God will cause his name to be honored. It looks like in this community God will come and dwell with them and bless them.

God has given them his word and he applies it to the community. Now surely they have what they need to live as the blessed people of God's kingdom.

But it also looked like that way back in the Garden of Eden, didn't it? It looked like Adam would be the head of the community there where God would cause his name to be honored, to dwell with them and bless them.

[20:36] But instead Adam and Eve, they rejected God's word. They lost sight of their love of God. They dishonored his name. And so as we look back, we understand that it's only from this side of the cross, it's only in Jesus that this could be true, that only through Jesus that we could be in this kingdom of God, that we could be God's blessed people.

As Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. This side of the cross, we know Jesus is the head of the community where God's name is honored, where God dwells by his Holy Spirit.

Spirit. And in him, the church is a community who have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. But that doesn't mean we simply just ignore and throw out the law completely.

Because of faith in Jesus, we come to this passage of God's word knowing it's given to us to help us grow as God's people, help us grow in our loving relationship with God.

And I love that about Jonathan's sermon last week, I did listen. It really helped us to see how the Ten Commandments actually help us to enjoy life in God's kingdom.

[22:04] In Christ, the law is not just a burden, this is God's word given to us to enjoy our relationship with God and with each other.

Because our loving relationship with God, when it's growing in fullness, it will spill over into our relationships with each other. And that's why the second thing we find in this passage is justice. When God's word is applied to a community, we find justice. God frees us from being enslaved to worship of ourselves, and so our hearts are able to love outwards.

First to him, then also to the people around us. And one word to try and capture this love between us as a community is justice.

From chapter 21, right to the final few verses of our passage, I'm calling this the middle section.

[23 : 15] And the middle section is all about justice. And as you scan through this middle section, you can see a number of different groups of people.

If you look to chapter 21, verse 2, the Bible translators have given us this heading, Hebrew servants. And as you scan across, you'll see personal injuries, protection of property, turn the page, social responsibility, laws of justice and mercy.

So there's a number of different people, a number of different groups and scenarios in this middle section about justice. So now you might be thinking, well, you know, I know justice is a good thing. We want people to be treated fairly, without discrimination, but why is it that applying the Ten Commandments leads to justice? Why is it so significant for a community of the kingdom of God to have justice?

Well, with that in mind, let's take a handful of examples from this middle section. Look down to chapter 21, verse 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.

[24 : 44] So the community Moses is living in, they would be a people who would call themselves Hebrews. So this verse is talking about a scenario where you buy a member of your own community as a slave.

So you might be thinking, hang on, why doesn't God just say never, never buy a Hebrew as your slave? Why doesn't God say never buy anyone as a slave?

Surely God who knows everything and is outside of time, he knows that slavery is wrong. Well, firstly I would say God may be outside of time so to speak, but the community Moses is living in and their culture is very much in time.

And secondly, ask yourself a question, how easy do you find obedience to God's word? Is it simply a case of God saying never do X, Y, Z and say, ah, I simply never do X, Y, Z.

God knows fallen sinners will fall into sin. So God says, if, if you end up buying a Hebrew servant, make sure he goes free in the seventh year.

[26 : 06] God's primary concern here is not for the owner but the welfare of the servant. And we see a similar dynamic through the running theme of this section on justice.

After the household servants, we've got a lot to do with compensation. So let's jump in the section on personal injury. Let's take a look at chapter 21 from verse 22.

If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows.

And so on. So God could simply just say, never hit a pregnant woman. End of. But will that stop people doing it?

God's God's primary concern is for the pregnant woman and the person she's growing inside of her. God's concern here in so many instances is for those who are oppressed, those in a position of vulnerability, for those who are weak, for those who face abuse, for those who are being harmed.

[27 : 28] God applies the ten commandments which are about love of him and love of one another in such a way that it values and focuses on the protection and care for those who so often in this fallen world just go unheard and unseen and uncared for.

And so hopefully that should answer your question, why find justice when God's word is applied to a community? Because justice is not just a set of legal rules or a set of ethics and it is those things, but at a deeper level justice is about love, a beautiful, compassionate, outward-looking kind of love. And when you think about a community of God's people in the context of the whole Bible story, it's always meant to be a community that is outward-looking, growing in fullness of love within, but then into the wider community.

Think of a bathtub filled with water. If you don't turn off the tap, the bath becomes so full that it over spills out into the bathroom, through the floorboards, into the living room.

love within, when God's word is applied to a community, it becomes so full, so full of love, that that love flows out into the wider community, out into woodlands, out into all of Glasgow.

[29 : 11] Think about the church plant that you're going to be planting. The love that is so full here in St. Silas is over spilling into the East End.

This is the big picture of what God is doing in Christ, to bring unity to all things in heaven and earth under Christ. In him, God has made a new humanity, one of peace, reconciled to God and each other.

And Jesus is the way to that new humanity, a people of God's kingdom where there is love, where there is justice, and finally, rest.

When God's word is applied to a community, you find a love that is expressed in worship of God, a love for each other expressed by commitment to justice, and a people who are learning to rest.

And this final point I want us to look at a theme from chapter 23, verse 10 onwards. So turn there with me. From verse 10, I want to draw your attention to the way God's word applied to community leads to rest.

[30 : 35] Let's start with verse 10 and 11. verse 10. For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops. But during the seventh year, let the land lie unplowed and unused.

Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left.

Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. So we have rest on the seventh year.

And then in verse 12, we have it on the seventh day. Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that your slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.

Work the land six years, let the land rest for one. Work six days of the week, let the people rest for one. Now, hopefully it's quite obvious to you that this is the application of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath rest.

Now, I know that some people carry some baggage about keeping the Sabbath. People's desire to protect a time on a Sunday for rest has led to a lot of restlessness.

[32 : 01] forgiveness. This week at my church, we were chatting about in our midweek men's group that for a lot of those guys who grew up in the Scottish Highlands, they have positive but also really negative stories to tell of how the Sabbath was kept on a Sunday.

day. But we agreed that a negative experience of God's word doesn't mean we just avoid it.

It doesn't mean that God's word isn't good. The Sabbath commandment as we find it applied here is clearly meant to be a good thing. In verse 10 and 11, the land is given rest so the poor and the animals receive provision.

Surely the poor and the animals would love Sabbath, not for its burdens and rule keeping, but for its abundant, gracious provision.

In verse 12, notice how the community are to only work six days so the animals can rest and if there's a foreign slave, they can be refreshed.

[33 : 18] God wants his creation, his people to rest and be refreshed. How wonderful is that?

We're quickly running out of time so let me just say something about verse 14, 15 and 16.

Notice God tells them to have celebrations and festivals. Perhaps because of the way the ten commandments have been misapplied, and mistreated culturally and historically, when you mention the ten commandments, the atmosphere changes.

Every time you say ten commandments, you can almost sense this sort of solemn atmosphere in the room. And yet, when God applies the ten commandments, when God is in charge of our time, our calendar, our ambition, how we live as a church community, well, he makes rest, refreshment, celebration, festivities to be a top priority.

Isn't that wonderful? Our God is a wonderful God who's done wonderful things for his people. And he sets aside time to not just enjoy what he's done, but to enjoy him.

That's what Sunday is for, to enjoy him. One of the little things that I'd like to do if I get some time is to start printing off all the pictures that I have on my phone of our family into an actual photo album like they used to do years ago.

[35 : 09] An actual tangible album so I can actually sit down and slowly look through the pages and actually just enjoy the pictures of what my family have been doing and what we remember.

And I was thinking, what if we were to make a photo album of our church family? What if you were to make a photo album of the St. Silas church family? What would you see on the pages?

Would you see a community where God's word is applied? Would those pictures tell the story of love, of justice, of rest?

Of course we need to keep in mind that there is always a future aspect for our church community, that the gospel, the good news of Jesus is that he has brought us into a loving relationship with

God, with each other, imputed his righteousness to us, he's secured our everlasting rest, he's opened the way to a new creation that doesn't groan but is glorious, with a community of perfect unity.

It is secured in Christ, but we must remember that until he returns, what we have is a taste, a very real and very beautiful taste, but it is a taste of what it will be like, a taste of what it means to love God and each other, a taste of what it means to be committed to justice, before the great judgment day when he puts all things right.

[36 : 54] There's also a taste of what it means to rest in the Lord before we enter with all the saints of all time into that everlasting rest, refreshment, celebrations, festivities in glory.

So I hope that tonight you will go away and reflect what it means for God's word to be applied to St. Silas, to this community, bearing in mind that there is a future glory.

So don't look for perfection now, but I hope and I'm sure you will see those three things, evidence of love, justice and rest.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for this time, this evening in your word. We pray that you would apply the message, your message to our hearts, that you would knit this community together by your Holy Spirit.

We pray that you would protect and stir our affections, help us to love you and meet you in our worship, friendship, help us to love each other as we commit to doing justice, and help us to rest in you, Lord.

[38 : 11] Help us to be so full of these things that it spills out into the community around us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. That's right.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.