

PASTOR SCOTT'S

MONTHLY MESSAGE



Jesus and Deuteronomy

What is the most radical, counter-cultural, book of the Old Testament? Many might name one of the prophets. My money is on Deuteronomy. We might be familiar with Deuteronomy 5 - the Ten Commandments (also in Exodus 20). These are frequently inscribed on courthouse walls, with particular emphasis on "Thou shall not kill/steal." Somehow those clamoring for these words to be so inscribed miss the rest of Deuteronomy, likely intentionally so.

What are they avoiding? Some highlights: the remission of debts every seven years, freeing slaves after six years of service (and sending them on their way most liberally supplied), forbidding interest, lend to the poor even if you might not get repaid, don't glean your fields (i.e., don't reharvest, leave the leftovers in the field for the hungry), etc. God knew that whatever "economic theory" (feudalism, socialism, capitalism, trade-and-barter, etc.) we put in place (also note: these are called "economic *theories*," not "economic *facts*") that inequities would persist creating injustices. Therefore, every six or seven years God commands a "reset," go back to "start," start clean - before the injustices get too out of hand.

Additionally, the Sabbath, it is for everyone's rest, including servants, the poor, and animals. The priests remind us the Sabbath is about emulating God. Notice, it is not one or the other, it is not piety or economic practices, the Sabbath is "both/and." The Deuteronomic code makes it clear that the worship of God is to structure society around everyone's needs.

The Lectionary covers a good portion of the Bible, but not all. One of the pieces left out is Matthew 26:11. We are in "Year A" of the Lectionary, the year of the Gospel of Matthew, so let's look at this. Matthew 26:11 reads, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." This falls into that list of "The Most Misunderstood Verses of the Bible."

Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 15:11a, "There will always be poor people in the land." The rest of that verse reads, "Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." Notice: the "action word" in this sentence is "command," not "suggest," "urge," or "would kind-of-like." Deuteronomy 15:11b is in the midst of God's instructions to forgive debts, free slaves, leaving some of the fruits of your work to the less fortunate, etc. Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 15:11a, embodying the perspective of the entirety of Deuteronomy. Jesus is not condoning poverty, he is not saying it is inevitable, he is not explaining that there will be poor and we might as well get used to it.

He is laying the fact that there *are* poor right at our feet. God's plan does not have "poor" or "hungry." Jesus and Deuteronomy are saying because we do not follow God's instructions, there are poor. Yes, because we don't follow the Ten Commandments (emphasis on "Have no other gods before me"), but also because we don't forgive debts and release slaves, because we do glean our "fields," charge interest, and demand pledges from those we lend to - because of our actions, there is injustice and therefore, the poor.

In Jesus telling the disciples that they will not always have him, he is passing the torch to them to carry on his work of restructuring society along God's plans, plans in which there is no such word as "poverty." It is sobering to think we have brought "poverty" into existence against the will of God.

Peace,

Pastor Scott