

Teaching: Good News of Provision for All

Teacher: Melissa Logsdon

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Key Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:4a NIV "However, there need be no poor people among you..."

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 15:1-11

INTRODUCTION

Hello, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Melissa Logsdon and I've been serving as Associate Pastor here at New Covenant Fellowship for about a year now. In this past year, I've grown so much in my relationship to God as I've been able to utilize my gifts teaching, writing, and pastoring in this fellowship. Thank you for allowing me to serve you in this role.

So this passage just read, from Deuteronomy 15:1-11, has been sticking to me since I read it last month. It's not like one of those verses that immediately sounds like good news to me. Not like "the joy of the Lord is your strength" or "I will be with you always". It's more like, Well, more like a piece of toilet paper stuck to the bottom of my shoe.

Have you ever had that happen to you?

Or if you don't want to admit that, have you ever SEEN it happen to someone else?

It's embarrassing. Annoying. Not at all sightly. And can be frustrating to shake.

I feel like this passage has been sticking to me like that.

It's embarrassing how much the Israelites then, followers of God now, don't follow God's good plan. It's annoying because it's asking us to consider trusting God maybe more than what's comfortable. It's unsightly because it's not the customary way the world negotiations debts and addresses poverty.

And you know the moment when you realize the toilet paper is stuck to your shoe and wonder how many people have seen you walking around like that; and just snickered at your inability to see what was right there before you the whole time.

GOD'S PROVISION PLAN

It seems like God had a plan on how to eradicate poverty, to provide for the poor, to see provision for all. With a cycle of canceling all debt every 7 years, cycles of generational poverty

would be interrupted. And with the prompt to continue with ongoing generosity, poverty could be eradicated.

This plan goes beyond just their own people. God gives them a choice to extend these same principles to dealing with foreigners in their land, saying: "You may require payment from a foreigner"... "However, there need be no poor people among you."

So I think in this plan there's the minimum way to follow in obedience with the "letter of the law" on the "must" language of canceling debt among their fellow people and obeying the "heart of the law" with the "may" language of extending this debt canceling practice to all in their land.

Why would God use that language? Give us these options?

I think about The ways God set up offerings: some as required offerings and then some as freewill offerings—giving us a way that we can express our gratitude, our joy, our trust. A way to share our blessings.

The passage goes on to encourage the people of God to be generous givers no matter the season (not considering how close they are to approaching the debt canceling year).

God's inviting an opportunity to partner in God's provision for all people. So, even though there will be people that become impoverished among us; it doesn't have to stay that way. God has a plan of provision for the ongoing care of the poor among them. If the people choose to not be hard hearted or tight fisted, but rather to be open-handed and freely lend whatever someone needs. To not count up the probability of if you will be repaid, but to do what is right and trust God to provide.

GOOD NEWS?

Shouldn't this be an action plan to embrace and celebrate.

The outcome of this plan seems like good news.

Why did the Israelites seem to not think it was good news?

As Jeff Trask shared in his teaching Freedom Now, on June 23rd, the Israelites did not follow this plan faithfully. Jeremiah records the consequences of their choice to not care for the poor and how they ended up in captivity instead of flourishing in abundance.

Why do I, and perhaps others, not read this plan as good news either?

One story comes to my mind:

Some time ago, I knew a man who wouldn't get teeth because he regularly would give all his money away to help those that needed it more than him. He came from a "sacrifice for Jesus" perspective. And it seems like he really followed the letter of this law, this plan—giving to all those who had need around him. I felt repulsed then by his model of generosity. I don't want to sacrifice like that! Is God really asking us to go without so others can have? How many of us have bumped into others with this model and been turned off to giving? Does this model cultivate faith or fear within us?

I don't see this idea of "going without so others may have" in this passage. It doesn't sound like there will be any lack on the part of the giver.

Rather, in this passage God says the ability to provide will come out of abundant provision, out of blessings that will come as they follow God. It's not an "either/or" scenario but rather an expansive provision—abundance, not scarcity of resources.

But how much does fear of scarcity get in the way of seeing the promised provision?

LOVE GOD OR LOVE PEOPLE/THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

What do followers of God do when the idea of helping others seems too scary/too difficult?

OR

When followers of God do focus efforts on trying to love others well...to follow the golden rule: "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you."

Do we get burnt out? Do we realize there is a lack within us? A lack of resources? More problems than we can solve? More needs than we can meet? Do we get jaded and bitter toward others, toward God?

Sometimes we retreat back and choose to focus on loving God well in our hearts and minds. Seems like a good plan, after all, it is part of the law. And how long does that work for us until we realize we fall short on that too. We may wonder if we just need to pray more...or something.

When questioned about how to live out our faith, this is how Jesus replies:

In Matthew 22:36-40 NIV we read:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

It seems like Jesus is holding these 2 commands together in tandem; the only way to really follow the way God has for us is to Love God AND Love people.

2 STORIES: A GENTILE WIDOW & A YOUNG BOY

I want to share 2 stories with you.

The first one is of the prophet Elijah and a gentile widow. There was a drought in the land and God had been providing for Elijah during this time with a raven to bring him food. One day, God changes how he will provide for Elijah and has him go to a town not among his fellow people, but to a gentile region. There he meets with a widow and through her God meets Elijah’s needs. But not just his needs to the detriment of her, but rather, God continues to provide for her and her son. This story is found in 1 Kings 17:7-16

1 Kings 17:7-16 NIV

“Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him: “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’ ” She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.”

The second story is of a crowd that had followed Jesus to the wilderness to listen to his teachings. Jesus wants to feed them, as they would not have food to eat that day since they had not worked. There is a young boy with a few loaves of bread and some small fish. He chooses to share his food with them and Jesus is able to provide for all of them with abundance.

In John 6:9-13 we read.

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there, plus women and children). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.”

In both of these stories we have people being willing to give what they have—even when it didn’t seem like much. We see that not only were the needs of the receiver met, but also the needs of the giver. In fact both the gentile widow and the young boy received more than they had at the beginning of their stories. (It’s also fascinating to me that the “heroes” of these stories—the givers—were people without much social status in their cultures: a gentile widow, a child. And those were the exact people God chose to partner with in these plans of provision.)

One thing they both have in common: they said “yes”.

This reminds me of the movie “Yes Day” with Jennifer Garner & Edgar Ramirez (2021).

In the movie, the kids are feeling like they are living under rules, rules, rules. The parents are equally not happy and frustrated with the building tension in their home. The parents learn of a parenting technique called a “Yes Day”. The kids have to earn it by good behavior, chores, etc. But the idea is that the parents will, within reason, say yes to everything that day that the kids want to do.

The result...they have a messy but fun day and they grow closer together as a family. Also, not only did it benefit the kids, and the parents’ relationships with the kids, but the parents each uniquely grew that day in self compassion and joy, as they lived that day with the wonder of a child. This day changed how they moved forward with their lives, their work, their parenting.

Which brings me to opportunity set before the Israelites in Deuteronomy and the opportunity set before us. Opportunities to partner with God in generosity. To say “yes”. To see how God will provide, not just for others, but for us in abundance too.

The parents in that movie would never had suspected saying Yes would give them so much good back. I don't believe the young boy sharing his lunch would have predicted he would return home with even more. Nor the gentile widow sharing the last scraps of flour and oil, desperately famished and then abundantly provided for with ongoing provision.

Their lives all changed for the better.

CONCLUSION

When Jesus declares good news he quotes Isaiah 61.

In Luke 4:18-21 we read Jesus say:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus is using this passage from Isaiah to declare the GOOD NEWS of freedom, healing, and provision for all.

It's easy to dismiss this as Jesus' mission. And going back to our passage in Deuteronomy 15, In verse 11 we read: “There will always be poor people in the land”. I've heard this verse quoted as an excuse to NOT give to the poor; the idea of the futility of trying to end poverty.

Why would God say this after all the provision talk? Is this verse highlighting the difference between God's plan for provision and our free will in partnering? Is this the reality of how hard life is? The idea that there will always be others, not identified like us, that will show up in our land (foreigners) in need?

Clearly the choice is ours.

In the reflections last week on Renee Antrosio's teaching, *To Whom Do We Listen?*, Jason Berg shared about the tendency that he (and others) can have for "all or nothing" thinking. If we can't do it all the way, why try to do it at all? And how he was thinking differently about how he could start to do things—to start somewhere with something.

What would it look like to say "yes" more? To partner with God's plan in trust and see how provisions are met for others, for us? What would our community look like if we were living in a Deuteronomy 15:4 world: "there need be no poor people among you"?

Where do we go from here?

I would like to live believing in a God that not only provides for me, but gives me enough to provide for others. I want to partner with the God that takes the little bit of flour and oil and makes enough for ongoing provision without anyone losing out. I want to be in the midst of the story of God using the little in our midst to bring provision for many, like the young boy sharing his lunch.

I want to believe when Jesus says that God's kingdom is here, and that it is good news to all...that it really is good news—to all.