

## “Blessed Is He That Considereth The Poor”

In Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 11, we read that the poor would always exist within the Land:

“... the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to they poor, and to thy needy, in thy land”

So it was, that the poor were to be given special privileges, and to be looked upon favourably by the Children of Israel, as they dwelt in the land of promise. As it is written: “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: Yahweh will deliver him in time of trouble” (Psa. 41:1). The poor, for the most part consisted of the “stranger, the fatherless and the widow” (Cp Deut. 24:17, 19, 20, 21): that is, those who had no helper to deliver them out of times of trouble. In the merciful provisions of the Mosaic Law, it was commanded that these three groups of people would be provided for in particular ways. Indeed, there were lessons to be learned from this, not simply issues of humanitarianism:

“Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow’s garment to pledge: *But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and Yahweh thy Elohim redeemed thee hence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.*” (Deut. 24:17-18).

In making provision for the poor then, Israel were to remember that they themselves once had no helper, when they were slaves in Egypt. Yet Yahweh had mercy and compassion upon them, and redeemed them from bondage. Therefore, they were to bless as they had been blessed; to give as they had been given. They were to bless the poor, because they themselves had been blessed of Yahweh.

This aspect of remembering one’s origins features several times in the Apostolic writings. After listing the seven qualities of the spirit, Peter was inspired to write:

“But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, *and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins*” (2 Pet. 1:9).

Again, James spake:

“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, *and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.* But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jas. 1:24-25).

Interestingly, James goes on to describe pure religion:

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27).

Pure religion then, involves tending to the needs of the fatherless and widows, a work which will surely be rewarded by the Almighty, when done in a faithful recognition of His Blessings. But the point of citing these verses, is to show that we, as Israel, must remember our origins. We were “purged from our old sins”. We must not forget what manner of men we were: under bondage to sin and death. Yet, the Love of God hath appeared unto men in providing an arm of salvation, to lift us out of the mire, and purify us with the blood of the Lamb. We are no longer in bondage, living under “the law of liberty” in Christ Jesus. Once being slaves to sin, we are now the servants of righteousness. Let us never forget what we once were, and the Grace of Yahweh in lifting us out from the dunghill, and setting us on high, being called His Sons through faith in Christ Jesus.

Deuteronomy chapter 24 speaks of particular means whereby the afflictions of the poor should be eased:

“When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that Yahweh thy Elohim may bless thee in all the work of thine hands” (Deut. 24:19).

This was truly a merciful provision, allowing the poor to enter the fields of their neighbours, and search out their own food. Far better than modern welfare systems of our age, this provision ensured that even the poorest could work to obtain the blessings of Yahweh, by going out to the field, and gleaning that which was left. Leviticus 19:9 goes on to further describe how that the corners of the field were also to be left when reaping the harvest, again, to make provision for the poor. This was just one way under the Law, in ensuring that the stranger, the fatherless and the widow were provided for.

In the book of Ruth, we come across one who was a stranger (a Moabitess), and a widow. She was sent by her mother-in-law, Naomi (who was also a widow) to glean in the field, to see what provisions she could obtain.

“And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech” (Ruth 2:3).

Boaz, seeing the damsel’s industry made enquiry as to who she was, and upon learning her identity said to her:

“Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go after them ...” (Ruth 2:8-9).

He also “commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not” (Ruth 2:15).

Here was a merciful man indeed – going beyond even what the Law required. Not fearing to be identified with the damsel, he referred to her as his “daughter” and moreover, rather than simply allow her to gather those sheaves which had been forgotten, or left in the corner of the field, he actually commanded his young men to drop handfuls as they went, for her to pick up after! Here was an Israelite indeed; one who recognised the spirit of the Law, and who sought to provide for one who had chosen Yahweh to be her God, and who desired to join herself to the Hope of Israel.

There is an interesting allusion to this in the ministry of Messiah. Matthew chapter 15 describes how a stranger, a woman of Canaan came to the Master, beseeching him to make provision for her. Her daughter was “grievously vexed with a demon”, and so she cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David ... but he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs” (Mat. 15:22-26).

In these words, we find the Master putting this Gentile to the test. As the parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8), it is required of those who would obtain Divine Blessing to show persistence – which in turn shows faith, and courage. In firstly ignoring the woman, and then twice sending her away (cp Ruth 1:8, 11, 12, 15), the Master was seeing whether she had the necessary faith both to persist in her request – and also to recognise her position as a Gentile seeking the blessings that were given to the Jews first. In his words, Messiah spoke of “the children’s bread” – food that belonged to those who were yet infantile in their understanding, yet who belonged in the House. Like the corn which grew in the field, his provision was primarily for Israel, secondly for “the stranger” who would come in faith, seeking his blessing. The woman recognised this, and said:

“Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table” (Mat. 15:27).

Like as sheaves of corn were permitted to fall on purpose for Ruth the Moabitess, so the Canaanitish woman made her request that the Master would permit “crumbs” to fall to her, from His Table. These words demonstrated her conviction that Christ would provide, and also showed how she recognised her position as a Gentile.

“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Mat. 15:28).

This event is filled with instructive principles, given for our learning. We also, as Gentiles, seek to take up the crumbs permitted to fall from the Master’s Table. We were “strangers”: “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

We must not forget our origins. We must not vaunt ourselves against the branches that were cut off through unbelief (Rom. 11). Rather, we must humbly recognise our position, and give thanks that we, who were once far off, are brought nigh by the blood of Christ.

Returning back to Ruth, we found that Boaz gave beyond the requirements of the Law, not simply in allowing sheaves to fall on purpose for the Moabitess to gather up, but also in giving her food to sustain her during her labours:

“Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and had left over” (Ruth 2:14).

Here, when the workers were all together sharing this meal of “bread” and “vinegar,” or sour wine, Boaz personally handed her the parched corn for her to eat, as a token of favour towards her.

These events are again reflected in the Ministry of Messiah. Matthew chapter 26 recounts how the disciples were together enjoying a meal of fellowship:

“and as they did eat, [Christ] said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me” (Mat. 26:21-23).

Simon Peter said unto him, “Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon” (Jno. 13:25-26).

Just as Boaz reached out the parched corn to Ruth, as a token of favour, even so Christ extended his favour to Judas the Betrayer. Even to the last, he treated this man as a brother and “friend” (Mat. 26:50), though he knew from the beginning who it was that should betray him. Granting him the sop from his own hand, in this act of favour Christ identified the Betrayer. Judas had no regard for the poor – not simply because he stole from the bag, but also because he aided the death of a “poor and needy man”, even Messiah himself (Psa. 109:16). He did not remember where he had been called from, and what he had been called to, but rather covenanted to betray the Son of the Highest for the price of a Hebrew bondsman. Blinded by the god of this world, Judas sought after his own things, to the exclusion of the things of Jesus Christ.

We come now to partake of the Memorial feast of bread and wine, after the example that was set for us in that upper room. The disciples, when alerted to the fact that a betrayer was amongst them, each said “is it **I**”. None of them looked accusingly at the other; they all looked inwardly at themselves. Even so, the Apostle Paul exhorts us:

“Let a man examine **himself** and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:28-29).

Let us therefore come to the emblems before us, as tokens of Yahweh’s favour extended to us. We were once strangers, in need of One to redeem us from our straitened position of being under the bondage of Sin and Death. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through Christ Jesus our Master, Redeemer, and coming King.

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