

God Is Not a Hard Taskmaster to Those Who Obey

by James Jennings

This sermon delves into the concept of God's mercy and kindness, contrasting the idea of Him being a hard taskmaster. It uses the illustration of exemptions given to soldiers in Deuteronomy 20, allowing them to enjoy the fruit of their labor before going to battle. The sermon emphasizes God's character of mercy, kindness, and the granting of rights and liberties to those who obey Him, ultimately pointing to the mercy displayed through Christ on the cross.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 20:1, Matthew 11:28, 1 Corinthians 9:7, Ecclesiastes 2:18, Romans 12:1, Luke 9:61, Matthew 11:28, Deuteronomy 28:47, 1 Timothy 4:3

Topics: "God's Mercy", "Kindness in Obedience"

Description

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Transcript

So before I have you turn to a chapter, I want to kind of illustrate something. I want to get you thinking. Imagine with me that our nation is going to war.

Going to war. We have battles that are going to happen really soon. And every one of us men is in the National Guard of this nation, and we're called to report to duty tomorrow morning.

So it's come upon us pretty fast. We didn't expect this. So tomorrow morning, we all load up in the buses and we head to the military base.

And on the way there, we've heard on the news. We've heard different reports about this enemy. We've heard that they have technology that is far superior than ours.

And we've heard that they have numbers that are far greater than our numbers. It's somewhat intimidating when you hear the report. Arriving at the base, we unload and form our lines before one of the commanding officers.

And the officer, his posture and the way he holds himself, you can see he doesn't have fear. He's not lacking any confidence about the situation that is before us. And then this officer starts to speak to us and he lists exemptions for why people won't have to go to battle.

He gives reasons why you can go home rather than possibly die in the battle. And so we're sitting there. We're listening.

We're kind of wondering, maybe one of the exemptions will apply for me. I could go home. So first, this officer, he says this.

He says, is there any man here who has built a new house and has not yet gotten to invite his family and friends over for an opening ceremony to celebrate it and to live in that house? Some people are, whoa, that's an interesting exemption. The officer says leave here. Go home and have that ceremony and live in that house, lest you die here and do not get to enjoy that and another person purchases the house and they live in it and not you.

So the first exemption, it takes a lot of us by surprise. The enemy has far superior technology, far superior numbers, and they're given an exemption like this? The officer, he lists another exemption. He then says, is there anyone here who has recently planted a vineyard, but you've not yet been able to enjoy the grapes and the wine from those grapes? Go home, lest you die in the battle, and another man comes and enjoys those grapes that you have labored for.

Then he goes on to a third exemption. The officer then says, is there any man here who's engaged to be married? You've not yet been married. You need to go home, lest you die and the woman you pursued ends up marrying another man.

And then the officer gives one more exemption and the meeting is dismissed. Now at this point, there's a soldier there who's new to this country. He's not been a citizen of this country with this type of law.

And he goes up to the officer and he says, sir, can you explain to me again why the man with the vineyard was sent home? What did you say again? Did you say that his family was in dire poverty and going to starve if he did not tend for the vineyard? The officer says, no, it was because he had not gotten to enjoy those grapes and the wine that comes from them. And we did not want him to die. And another man take that vineyard and enjoy it and not him who labored for it.

This new citizen, he can't believe what's being said. He's in shock. What do these laws reflect about the lawgiver who gave them? Then the soldier says, but the report said the enemy has superior technology.

They have numbers. And you're sending people home to enjoy grapes and drink wine? You've got to be kidding. And this new citizen's thinking, what does this reflect about this nation's confidence to win the battle? That they could send people home to enjoy grapes.

And then the soldier says this, this new citizen, this new soldier of this country who's taking in these laws, he says, and sir, you mean to tell me that the man who built his house years ago and has labored in countless wars is not given a break? But the guy who with his new house gets to go home? Has not the veteran earned his rest? And you're letting the young men go home? The officer says, no sir, that's not a mistake. That is how the laws are in our country. And those laws reflect that nation's founder.

Now what would you say of such a nation? What would you think? I mean, if you go look at America and you look at exemptions, you're not going to find stuff about going home and enjoying grapes. You're not going to find stuff about you built a new house. It implies the guy could even have another house and it's a second one.

How do those laws reflect the founders of that nation? Because that's what law does. When you have rules given, it reflects something about the one who made it. Does this speak to you that this ruler of this nation is a hard taskmaster? Or that he's incredibly kind and merciful? Yeah, incredibly kind and merciful.

Or someone would say it reflects he's foolish. Ah, but they don't know the one who rules this nation. Now brethren, this example does not reflect laws of a ruler of a nation who is flimsy.

But of our God. So turn to Deuteronomy 20. I want to speak to you on God is not a hard taskmaster.

God is not a hard taskmaster to those who obey Him. Deuteronomy 20. You see, in verse 1, we have laws concerning warfare.

When you go out to war against your enemies, and you see horses, so He's knowing what our eyes see, it affects us. The battle is by faith. And chariots.

And you see an army larger than your own. You shall not be afraid of them. They're larger.

They have horses and chariots. We don't have that type of technology. Don't be afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

We can look on the history of this nation and see their God's deliverances. Verse 2, and when you draw near to the battle, the priests shall come forward and speak to the people. So you've got a spiritual leader giving an exhortation, a sermon.

Verse 3, and He shall say to the people, Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies. Let not your hearts faint. Do not fear or panic.

Or be in dread of them. Why? For the Lord your God is He who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory. Now, verse 5, we're about to see four exemptions.

Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, Is there any man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. Verse 6, and is there any man who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. And is there any man who has been betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man..." Not the one who labored.

"...take her." And then verse 8, "...and the officers shall speak further." And they give this other exemption to the people and they say, Is there any man who appears fearful, fainthearted? You go back to your house, lest you make the heart of your fellows melt like his own. And when the officers had finished speaking to the people, then commanders shall be appointed at the head of the people. So they wait to appoint commanders after people have gone home.

People went home after hearing the sermon from this priest, I'm not fearing. And some, apparently in verse 8, were still afraid and they could affect their comrades. But here you see these four exemptions.

And what I'm focusing on is three. All four of them give a reason. Lest.

Lest another man. Lest another man. Lest another man.

And then the fourth is lest what you do to other people, how you affect them. So three of them go together. And I want to look at those three.

As I look at those three, the tree I'm trying to cut down is to show you God is not a hard taskmaster. He is not like the Egyptians who would hear Israel's making bricks. Do you think that the Egyptians would have had such exemptions from making bricks one day because you haven't been married yet? Or you had a vineyard.

They didn't have that. No. That is a hard taskmaster.

This is not our God. So first, we've got to ask this question. Why can God even allow the person to go home? Why can God even let a person go home to enjoy the grapes from that vineyard? Why? This is the answer that I'm going to put forward because He's sovereign.

Because He's fully in control and the victory belongs to Him. Without a sovereign God fully in control, He would not be able to have such exemptions. If God wasn't in control, could He be such a taskmaster as He is, not being a hard one? No, He wouldn't be able to.

Because if it all depends on us and not on a sovereign God, then it's our responsibility. It's all on us. We need every man we can get.

That's not the same with our Lord. Because He's sovereign, He can treat people in such a way because God's in control. So secondly, what reason is given for the person to go home? Now, this really matters.

If you go look at this passage, many commentators will say the reason they go home is that when they're on the battlefield, they're thinking about their vineyard, they're thinking about the grapes, they're thinking about the person they're wanting to marry, they're thinking about the house, and it distracts them and that's why they were sent home. Look, the people in the fourth exemption, it's very clear why they were sent home. They would be a hindrance.

What does the text give as the reason for why they are sent home? Verse 5, near the end, He gives the reason. Let them go back to his house. And then He says, lest he die, so we don't want the guy to die, in the battle, and then what happened? What is the thing that our God does not want to happen? Again, another man dedicates the house.

Not the one who labored for it. Go to the second exemption. Lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit.

You see that? Again, the reason is not that the man is out on the field thinking about his house and distracted. That's not in the text. The reason is our God does not want another man to enjoy the fruit, another man to dedicate the house, and then as it goes on to say, in the last one, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.

God does not want another man to come along and marry that person whom this man was going to marry. That's very clear the reason. Now that matters to us.

Because when I read this this last week in my morning reading, it didn't bother me. It's like I had never seen that. That God would give that as a reason.

He gives this exemption, not wanting a man to die, because He wants the man to go home and enjoy His vineyard. He wants the man to go home and dedicate his house. This says something to us about who our God is.

What does it say? Well, one way you could look at it and as we're going to see, because this verse is actually referred to in the New Testament, Paul pulls on one of these verses. God wants the man who labored over each of those things to enjoy the fruit of his labors. God desires, not saying it's going to happen 100% of the time, but God's character is such that these men labored over something and the Lord does not want them to die before they've enjoyed the blessing and the fruit of their labor.

Meaning, the Lord is not saying labor and then there's no enjoyment from the labor and I'm just going to take you out before you've got to enjoy that. The Lord desires the man who labored over the vineyard to not die without enjoying the fruit of the vineyard for himself personally. Personally.

The thought of another man coming and enjoying that privilege is not God's heart on the matter. The thought of another man coming. I was trying to think of another way you could think about this in our own lives.

You think about the heart of the matter and someone's character and what they desire. Think about a father. He's got daughters.

Don't you desire to see the dad raise his children and before he dies, he can give them away in marriage? Right? The thought of another man giving that guy's daughter away, that happens. But our heart says what? I want the dad who raised the children, who poured himself into them to see his daughter get married, to walk her down the aisle, and to give her away. Our hearts say that's very kind.

That's merciful that that father would be allowed to have such a privilege and such a right. That's the feeling. Subjective, but there's something right about that.

A man labored over his children and he gets to the point where he sees this daughter given away. Now, many fathers die before getting to do that, but the point is that's God's heart, His character. It does not mean it will happen every time.

You know, the Lord did not have to make such exemptions. But because our God is merciful, He has to. He does.

His character demands it. And that's what we see here. And the laws given in Deuteronomy, the second giving of the law, they reflect that for this physical nation of Israel.

I mean, imagine being in this nation and you have a God who makes such an exemption as that. I mean, it's like I want to serve in this nation. Third thing, think of this.

These three exemptions, you could categorize them at three different levels of importance. Right? If you could pick one of the exemptions to keep and you get rid of two of them, which one would you keep and say is maybe the most important? To me, it's pretty obvious. Yes.

Right? I think if we did a poll, the majority of you would say I wouldn't want to pick. If only one person could go home, it wouldn't be the guy with the vineyard. I would pick the guy who is betrothed to get married, and he goes home and he gets married.

Okay? Even in this very chapter when they actually take the city in the law, v. 19 at the end, it says are the trees and the field human that they should be besieged by you? Meaning, God doesn't look at a tree and a human as equal. A vineyard does not have the same value as a person in marriage. But nonetheless, the Lord puts these three even though they might appear to have a different level of importance.

You know what that shows us? Our God does not just give exemptions for those that have the highest level of concern. God cares about things that are smaller, but a person labored over it, and He doesn't want another man to die and enjoy that which that man hath labored over. So even in something less important than marriage, enjoying the fruit of the vineyard, God still wants that person to get that particular blessing from that thing.

What a kind Master we have. You see, God's not a hard taskmaster. He's not like the Egyptians.

And again, my hope as we're going through this, I hope some of you realize you might actually have a misrepresentation of God. And doesn't Paul say that in 1 Corinthians 15? We'd be found to be misrepresenting God. You could have an aspect of God's character in this place, His mercy, and it could be distorted in a little bit where you're not viewing the fullness of how merciful and kind the Lord is.

So, let's think. Fourth thing. All three exemptions involve a person enjoying the temporal blessing and fruit of their labor.

And all three exemptions involve a way for them to bear fruit for God. They're not being sent home to do something non-spiritual. They're spiritual aspects.

They're not just enjoying the fruit of the labor physically, but there's praise and honor going to the Lord. So let's think about these things. First, consider the dedicating of the house.

That's the first exemption right there. If you build a new house and you've not dedicated it, let him go back to his house lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. Now, think about the temporal blessing.

There are different texts that use this word of dedicate. And they have different Hebrew words behind it. It's not totally clear to me at the moment on which specific dedication this is referring to.

But here, one example, in Nehemiah 12, when you think about a dedication, Nehemiah 12 says this, "...and at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem..." So there's some dedication going on. "...they sought the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgiving, and with seining, with syllables, harps, and lyres." So that's a temporal blessing. In this life, that celebration provides joy right there.

And that honors the Lord. There's another verse. Maybe this is the idea.

Leviticus 27. There's a law there. It says, "...when a man dedicates his house as a holy gift to the Lord, the priest shall come and value it." So he's basically appraising it.

And based on its value, verse 15, "...and if the donor wishes to then buy back his house, he should add a fifth to what the appraisal was, and it shall be his." So maybe it's that idea. Maybe this guy built this house

to actually give it and donate it as a gift to the Lord. And so maybe that's part of why this exemption is here.

Yes, a celebration. There's temporal joy for what a man labored over, but there's also the completion of this sacrifice, this offering to the Lord. So this bears fruit to God.

These men are not being exempt to go home and do things that are non-spiritual. The whole Christian life is spiritual. So the second exemption, enjoying the fruit of the vineyard.

Obviously, what's the temporal pleasure? Tasting of the fruit. And anyone who has any plant in your yard, you prune that thing, you fertilize it, you water it, you can't wait. You see the fruit start to appear, you can't wait to the point where you're able to pick those off.

I can't wait for my Japanese plum tree to be ripe again. I mean, those are so good. And imagine missing out on that.

God wouldn't care about that. No, you labor over something. There's God's character.

He desires we enjoy, as we'll see in a couple of verses in 1 Timothy. So, does this bear fruit to God? Leviticus 19, if you've got a Bible turned there. Leviticus 19.

You don't have to turn there, but if you want Leviticus 19.23. When we think about how does going home and enjoying the grapes, is there actually bearing fruit to God in this? Leviticus 19.23. When you come into a land, and they're going into a land here right before in Deuteronomy. They're going into a land. When you come into a land and plant any kind of tree for food, tree, okay, well, a vineyard, is that really a tree? In Matthew 7, Jesus says grapes, and then He talks about trees.

So it seems Christ uses grapes, meaning a vineyard, and trees interchangeably. So tree here, we might not say a vineyard is a tree, but it seems Christ uses it in that way. You come into the land, you plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden.

Okay, how long? Three years. It shall be forbidden to you. It must not be eaten.

Then the fourth year comes along, and its fruit shall be holy. And what do you do with the fruit? Here the spiritual fruit is, you offer it as a praise to the Lord. Then v. 25, but in the fifth year, you may eat of its fruit to increase its yield for you.

I am the Lord your God. So imagine, this one guy, he might have actually planted his vineyard and he's only two years in. And he's exempt to go home and finish the job for the next three years, not going to war, to get to the point where he's offered his praise to the Lord, right? There's spiritual offering there.

And at the same time, he's been able to enjoy it. See, our God cares. And the victory is so much His that He could actually send you home from battle for three years or whatever amount of time.

Like He doesn't need you. He does need you to be doing something lesser, apparently, in worshiping Him and that. And it's not lesser, because you're obeying God where you're at.

So, marriage. The last one was marriage. The pleasures of marriage.

Think about the temporal blessing. Deuteronomy 24. This is one people will quote.

It's not in the laws of American government that I know of. But here our Lord, Deuteronomy 24, 5, when a man is newly married. So, the man just got sent back who was betrothed and now he marries the woman.

Does he then rush back to the battlefield? Do they need him right away? He shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year. To do what? To be happy with his wife.

God desires you to be happy with your wife. That's a very nice temporal blessing. Imagine being that soldier at home that year.

Not a month. Not two months. There are people who've been married and two weeks later, they're going on a tour.

Not right there. That makes you all the more appreciate the lawgiver. It makes you appreciate him who's not a hard taskmaster.

Be happy with his wife. That's a temporal blessing. And you could say what is one of the spiritual blessings for the physical nation of Israel of people getting married? Maybe not spiritual, but the point is children.

It really mattered to have children. And so now they're married. They have an opportunity to be happy and have children.

Proverbs 5, 18, let your fountain be blessed and take pleasure in the wife of your youth. So there's physical pleasure with children if God wills it. So, all three of these, there's an aspect of temporal blessing where the laborer is getting what he labored for and enjoying it in this life.

And there's an aspect of it having spiritual offerings and praise and worship to God. My point is they didn't just send these three groups of people home to do nothing that was not worshiping and obeying God. Okay, so let's move on.

So, I get an exemption from war to go enjoy this temporal, physical thing I've labored over to bear fruit for God in doing so. And I'm doing this being in God's will. I'm not actually at home with a conscience condemning me that I'm not out there with the other brothers.

Look, God gave them the victory, but it says, lest you die. When God gives victory, it doesn't mean no soldiers die. There are some battles in the Bible where God wiped the enemy out and no one died.

But you're at home with a clear conscience. And your friend might be out there dying who built his house five years ago. And you're at home with your new house.

And that's the Lord. He's not a hard taskmaster. So, the fifth thing I want to consider is this, and this is kind of the thrust throughout this, is this, God gives incredible rights and liberties to those who obey.

God gives incredible rights and liberties to those who obey. Turn to 1 Corinthians 9. And if you have a marker, keep something in Deuteronomy 20. Paul refers to one of these exemptions in 1 Corinthians 9. And that matters because Paul is interpreting this verse in the New Testament.

He's taking a Mosaic law and he's showing us what was at the heart of that law. And what was at the heart of that law shows us what is at the heart of God. And that matters because we want to know who our God is and we want to strive to have a perfect representation of Him.

A view of Him. 1 Corinthians 9. In this whole chapter, Paul is talking about surrendering his rights. If you have an ESV, that's what they actually put at the title because that's what Paul is dealing with.

Let's look at v. 7. Verse 4. Let's look at Paul's language here. What language is Paul using? Do we not have the right to eat and drink? He's talking about a right. A liberty.

Something given. Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife as do the other apostles and brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? So they're saying you don't have a right or have no right to refrain from working. Verse 7. Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? And then here he talks about the vineyard.

Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who plants? It's like he's saying, you can't even imagine that. I mean, a guy plants a vineyard, he labors over it. We even know that if he gets called to war, there's an exemption for him to go home and eat of that fruit and enjoy it.

He's got a right there given to him where he can go and do that. Or who tends to a flock without getting some of the milk? And he goes on, he's just getting the same principle about rights. And then he says in v. 8, do I say these things on human authority? Does not the law say the same? So he's saying this isn't my opinion.

V. 9, for it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. Just think of that for a moment. If you have an ox and you put a muzzle on it, it's not able to eat while it works.

Is that kind? Or is it kinder to take the muzzle off and the ox is doing the same plowing, he's eating some as he goes? What's kinder? To take the muzzle off of the ox. You see, the Lord is kind and merciful towards the ox. And in this context, Paul is talking about them financially supporting him for his labor.

Meaning Paul is laboring and preaching and teaching, and he's saying I should actually be rewarded in this life for the spiritual labor through finances. There's a right for that. Now, Paul's not claiming that right.

He's surrendering it, but he's saying it is there. That is in God's character. It is not wrong for you all to support me for my labor that I am doing.

V. 10, does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake because the plowman should plow in hope. See, you plow in hope, you plant a vineyard in hope, you build a house in hope, you hope you pursue the woman to marry in hope. Of what? Sharing in the crop.

Sharing in the crop. V. 12, if others share this rightful claim on you, do we not even more? Nevertheless, we've not made use of this right. We endure anything.

So Paul endures these things. But my point is, this shows us when we see this law, you should think of a nation's leader who gives incredible rights and liberties to his citizens. Not to be taken advantage of.

Offentimes to be surrendered. But that's our God. And He's a God who wants not another man to enjoy the fruit of your labor, but to you actually to enjoy the physical temporal blessings in this life, and at the same time, you're sowing spiritual fruit in your life.

So, the fact we have rights gloriously reflects our Lord. I mean, Him giving us such privileges makes you want to serve Him all the more. The Lord does not have a problem with people being rewarded for the work and the labor they have done.

And obviously the laws in Deuteronomy 20, they show that. So God is not a hard taskmaster like the man who muzzles the ox. Again, hard taskmasters, that's the Egyptians.

What? They didn't even give them straw at some point. Just making everything so difficult. That's not the Christian life.

God does not just make everything so difficult in that sense. Doesn't mean we won't have fiery trials and difficulties. Okay, turn to Deuteronomy 28.

This is the sixth point. So let me just phrase this point with this initially. What is not happening here in these verses? We've looked at what is.

Paul says rights. I mean, that's what happens when the man can enjoy his vineyard. He's been given incredible rights.

These exemptions, that is an incredible right given in the law there in Deuteronomy 20. That's the opposite of a hard taskmaster who is oppressive. Oppressive.

So you could think of these two different, a taskmaster who's oppressing you and a taskmaster who is, yoke is easy, his burden is light. So Deuteronomy 28. Let's look at verse 15.

Now look what happens here if you do not obey. And that is my title of the sermon is, God is a hard taskmaster to those who obey Him. Verse 15, If you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all His commandments and His statutes that I command you today, then all the curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Okay, so he's talking about those who don't obey. Then go down to verse, sorry, I should have marked it. Where's, right there, verse 30.

Verse 29, verse 29. And you shall grope at noonday. It's the blind grope in the darkness.

You shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall only be oppressed. So those who don't obey, facing oppression, what does that look like? And robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you in verse 30.

Verse 30 gives the exact opposite of the three exemptions. You shall betroth the wife, but another man will ravish her. You will build a house, but you shall not dwell in it.

You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit. And what does he call that? If you don't experience those three things, he calls it there is you will be oppressed and robbed continually. Our God is not a God who oppresses you continually.

Our God is a God who gives such incredible mercy and kind laws. Yet at the same time in this text, this doesn't mean you just go away and say it does not matter my obedience. Here it's saying that oppression will be brought onto you by God here if you do not obey for this physical nation of Israel.

And that's sadly what happened to Israel and eventually your laws. You don't have stuff like Deuteronomy 20. You miss out on these glorious realities.

Look, in Psalm 32, even for a Christian like King David, when he disobeyed, there was actually oppression temporally, not eternally. Oppression in this life by God. God's hand was heavy upon him.

His strength as dried up as by the heat of the summer. God was disciplining David. Now turn to Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes chapter two. So God is not opposed to temporal curse for disobedience. But if you're a Christian, he's doing that as a loving father, Hebrews 12 says, that you might share in his holiness.

Now in Ecclesiastes, we see this same idea about this heart attitude of allowing someone to enjoy the fruit of their labor. That you're laboring with an expectation here. In Ecclesiastes two, verse 18.

Now this is Solomon writing this. It says in 1.1, the son of David. The words of the preacher.

Verse 18, I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing I must leave it to a man who will come after me. So here, even this idea of a man coming after and enjoying that which you labored for. He talks about this idea.

And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and use my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and I gave up my heart to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun.

Because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. You catch that? Leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.

This also is vanity and a great evil. Verse 22, What is a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow and his work is a vexation. Even in the night, his heart does not rest.

This also is vanity. Verse 24, There's nothing better for a person than he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also I saw is from the hand of God.

Now look at verse 25. Apart from the Lord, apart from Him, who can eat or who can have enjoyment? You see, there's no true enjoyment apart from God. No true enjoyment apart from God.

And look at verse 26, For to the one who pleases Him, God has given wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But to the sinner, He has given the business of gathering and collecting only to give to the one who pleases God. Did Solomon live a life pleasing to God? Was Solomon honoring and pleasing the Lord? I would say he was not.

He was not pleasing God. And here it says, I hated all my toil. Verse 20, I turned about and gave up my heart to despair.

Here is a man who is disobedient in all of his wives and sexual immorality. He's disobedient in different ways. And here he's just giving his heart up to despair.

And yet, it reveals, as in our text, there is this reality, verse 25, he should eat and drink and find enjoyment. That should happen. A person should find enjoyment in what he's toiled over.

And apart from Him, you won't even actually have enjoyment. So any enjoyment from the physical is ultimately only there because one enjoys God utmost. And you think, you read this and you think about some of those verses in 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 4 Foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving. By who? Those who believe and know the truth. Those who are obeying the Lord.

For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it's received with thanksgiving. He goes on in chapter 6. Paul is talking about riches. And yet, he says in verse 17, "...as for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches." So their hope's not in this.

Their hope isn't that I'll ultimately get to enjoy the fruit of my labor. That might happen after I die that I enjoy the fruit of all my prayer. Don't set your hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

So Paul even says God provides us with everything richly to enjoy. And he's talking there, he's dealing with money. And then in the chapters earlier, he's dealing with food.

You see, houses, vineyards, they're not things inherently sinful. They can be used for God's glory and God actually likes us to get enjoyment. It would be wrong to say there's no enjoyment from the good-tasting food that we'll have at the fellowship meal.

Or pot providence as we call it or something like that. It'd be wrong to not have enjoyment. That'd actually be not giving thanks to God for these things that people have labored over.

Pete once a year will catch all this fish and cook us fish. There's something about the blessing of serving the saints and giving them all of this fish that's not wrong. For him to enjoy seeing that and experience that.

If he caught all that fish and he cooked it all, and then the Lord took him to glory and he didn't get to enjoy that, we'd kind of be sad that he wasn't there able to see that. You see, God gave the reason. Lest another man.

Lest another man. The Lord wanted the man who labored over it to enjoy it. That will not always happen.

But that's God's character in that law. It's being revealed to us. The Lord is kind like that.

So we've got a couple minutes left. Just a couple maybe possible objections that could come to someone's mind. Let me answer a couple of them.

Luke 9. You hear all of this and you say, well, Luke 9, another said, I'll follow You, Lord. And He gave an exception. But let me first say farewell to those at my home.

What's Jesus say? Jesus said to him, no one puts his hand to the plow and looks back as fit for the Kingdom of God. So someone could hear that and say, wait a minute, James, this exemption, going to war, that's following Jesus, right? No, that's not the point. The people who went home and built the house were doing it to honor Christ.

To honor the Lord. And they were actually obeying a command. The man in Luke 9, whose idea was it that I want to go home and say bye to my family? It was his idea.

He said, but, let me go. In Deuteronomy 20, whose idea was it to let people go home? The officers are to say because it's in the law, you go home. You see the difference there? So you can't take this idea and say, well, Luke 9 just undoes all of this.

In Luke 9, they're rebelling against the Lord and we have an example of those who are loving something more than the Lord. In Deuteronomy 20, we have an example of people actually obeying a command and going and loving the Lord by enjoying the fruit from their grapes. From their vineyard.

They're actually honoring God and doing that. While some men are out at battle getting killed. To protect their land with their vineyard.

So Jesus is rebuking them in Luke 9 for their rebellion. Not obedience. Not being commended for obedience.

The Lord wanted to know were these people for Me or against Me? For Me or against Me? Same thing, Luke 14. Another text. Someone says, I've married a wife.

I cannot come. It seems like that puts a negative view on someone's marriage. One of the old preachers said when he got married, I will not preach one less sermon because I'm married.

That's how he interpreted that text. When I married Bethany, Bob made sure I did not have that view. He did not want me to think I'm never going to not preach one less sermon because I'm marrying Bethany.

It's not going to affect my life. I'll go be gone for three weeks and two months and it won't matter. That's not the point there.

Again, Luke 14, you've got the cost of discipleship. You've got people who aren't even in the kingdom. You've got people who are refusing to come to Christ because they love something more than Him.

You don't have people obeying a command of an exemption that was given to them. Luke 14 has a picture of people refusing Christ. Is there a place for someone whose wife is sick to miss out on preaching? To miss out on a mission trip because they've got to take care of their wife? Yes.

And that's loving and kind and merciful for them to do that. Rather than them say, no, honey, the kingdom's what matters first. I don't have time for you.

That's not the attitude. Yeah. The Demoniac Mark 5. He wanted to go with Christ and Christ said, go home and tell your family of how I've had mercy on you.

He wanted them to go home to his family there. Rather than saying to him, well, no, you've got to hate your family. You can't ever see them again.

So an eighth point as we close here is this, God is merciful. Well, this isn't an eighth point. This has been the point of the whole sermon.

God is merciful and kind and not a hard taskmaster. I mean, the Lord allowing such enjoyment should do what? Well, thankfully, I don't have to come up with that answer because it actually gives it in

Deuteronomy 28. Deuteronomy 28, 47.

You don't have to turn it if you don't want. Let me read this. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, why? Why would I serve the Lord my God with joyfulness and gladness of heart? Because of the abundance of all things.

You see, God abundantly giving, God's abundant kindness towards us makes you want to go joyfully serve the Lord all the more. Imagine being the soldier who gets the exemption and you go home, you spend three more, you get to the fourth year, you offer all the grapes to the Lord, you get to the fifth year, and finally you harvest that for yourself and you're enjoying it. Three years later, the militia's called up again to go to battle.

That exemption doesn't apply. Because of your ruler's past kindness to you, would that not make you want to serve all the more in the future? Yeah. I mean, just think about your jobs.

If they show kindness to Evan at his work and they give him all this time off to go to Nepal, when he gets back, he's not looking for more time off necessarily. He's wanting to serve all the more because of their kindness. Because they're not being a hard taskmaster.

They're not saying, no, you can't go and do anything. They're actually being kind, merciful, letting you enjoy, in this case, grapes, house dedication and the party, and sexual pleasures of marriage. Wow! Wow! So what do mercies of God do? They don't make you fight for your rights.

They make you grateful you have any rights and willing to die for those rights that others might be saved to have the same master as you have. God is not oppressive. Romans 12, what do these mercies do? I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And what mercies was Paul talking about? Paul was talking about the greatest exemption that exists. You can be exempt from going to hell because Christ on that cross suffered your wrath in your place. And He is saying, don't go on like this in your sin lest you die and go to hell.

You come home to Me and I will forgive you of all of your sin, adopt you as My child, give you pleasures forevermore, in heaven. That is the real mercy of God. When we think about mercies motivating us, it's the cross of Christ.

It's what Christ has done. But these laws given to the physical nation of Israel about how they would call up their troops and go to war, we see that same God's mercy there in those exemptions and wanting the laborer to enjoy that which he labored for. And that's the God who calls men to come to Christ.

Matthew 11, Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden. Oh, they're just laboring. And He says, I'll give you rest.

What type of rest? Take My yoke upon you. Learn from Me. Why? For I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

For My yoke is easy. My burden is light. God is not a hard task, Master.

His yoke is easy. His burden is light. I realize Matthew 7 narrows the way that leads to life.

It's hard. Strive to enter through the narrow door. All those are true.

But as we do those things, we do it in view of God's mercy and kindness towards us. So some of you, my hope, is you've needed a better view on the Lord being a kind and merciful God who's not a hard task, Master. That was my goal because I think that's the goal of that text.

That law shows that aspect of God's character. So, these Old Testament laws give us one angle at the mercy of the Lord and not wanting another man to enjoy the fruit of our labor, but for us to enjoy such fruit. And yet, as was mentioned, obedience matters.

If you're living in sin and immorality and you're sitting here thinking, wow, this is such a comforting sermon, it should not comfort you. You will have oppression, especially if you're a true child of God, you should have that because of fatherly discipline. Okay, well, that's all.

Let me pray. Lord, thank You for who You are. I pray You'd continue to open our eyes that we would understand wonders out of Your law and see great and mighty and hidden things that we have not known.

And Lord, I just pray for believers here today, Lord, they're seeking to walk in the light after You. And Lord, they might even have a sensitive conscience and they could take this and say, well, wait a minute, I struggle with sin. And Lord, what does struggle even mean? Lord, I realize there's confusion at times, but Father, I just pray people would see Your mercy, Your kindness, Lord, that is even displayed in these exemptions.

Lord, that we would enjoy, yes, even have enjoyment from physical things. Lord, help us when we eat and drink during this fellowship meal to do all to the glory of God. Lord, when we receive those desserts that we would receive it with thanksgiving, they were created by You to be received in such a way.

Lord, and to enjoy these things. Lord, we never want physical to grip our hearts. Lord, we're not living in this world.

Lord, we just want what enjoyment is right and given to us by You. So Lord, keep us balanced. Lord, I pray You'd help this sermon, Lord, if something was imbalanced, that You would help a person think right about it.

And so Lord, I just commit the rest of our time to You. In Christ's name, amen.

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