

Exodus 22:21–27

The Empathetic, Gracious God Who Commands His People to Be Empathetic and Watchful to Care

Friday, September 2, 2022 ▫ Read Exodus 22:21–27

Questions from the Scripture text: What two things shall they not do especially to whom in v21? Why? What two groups are they especially to avoid doing what to in v22? If they do this to one of the three, what might they do (v23)? And what would the Lord do? What will happen when He hears their cry (v24)? And what will the Lord do? With what results? To whom might they do what in v25? Whom must they not be like in this case? By not doing what? What might they do when they loaned something (v26)? But what must they do in such a case? Why—what two things is his garment for him (v27)? And when does he especially need it? And what might he do if he can't sleep? And what will the Lord do when the poor man cries to Him? Why will the Lord hear?

Why should God's society have empathy toward the needy? Exodus 22:21–27 looks forward to the evening sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these seven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **whereas men tend to take special advantage of the needy, God has a special ear for them, so His people must have a special empathy toward them.**

God commands special carefulness toward the needy. The sojourner, the widow, and the fatherless are mentioned here together for the first time. A sojourner owned no land and had no status. Note that Israel is not commanded to give them status. Neediness is not so much a lack of means as it is a lack of status, defender, or advocate.

God's people, of course, are not to mistreat, oppress, or afflict anyone. But it is those who appear not to have a defender that we are more tempted to mistreat. Beware! Appearances are deceiving. The Lord Himself is their defender. So you must not lend to them in order to get something from them (v25). You must make sure that they have access to their collateral when they need it (v26). And you must make sure not to take advantage of them in any other way (v23).

God commands special empathy toward the needy. Notice that God doesn't just give the command but in vv26–27 in particular, he paints a picture and asks a question.

He paints the picture of the needy person in just their undergarment, skin exposed. The sun has gone down. There's a chill in the air, portending several hours of dropping temperatures.

Now, the Lord asks the question. "What will he sleep in?" It's different than stating, "he has nothing to sleep in." Instead, the Lord forces the hearer to put himself in the place of the needy one. He makes us come to the conclusion that there is nothing to sleep in. We can feel the cold and the slow, tortuous sleeplessness that comes with it.

God Himself is empathetic. Notice the statement in v23, "Hearing, I will hear their cry." And again in v27, "I will hear." And notice also the "warmth" of the language in v24, "My wrath will become hot." We know that God cannot change, so it's not like there are changing emotions in Him. He doesn't change, but as people and circumstances do, God's perfectly consistent disposition brings them into a differing relation to Him. He speaks this way to communicate to us His empathy toward the needy. He is our example in this. And He is our danger if we don't!

God Himself takes vengeance because He is gracious. Creatures such as we are, who are subject to emotions, have difficulty holding those two things together. But for the Lord, they both come from His perfectly consistent ("divine immutability") and cohesive ("divine simplicity") character. He is gracious toward the needy, which means He will avenge whatever advantage is taken of them.

Notice that God does not command the Israelite society to inflict a special punishment, and He elsewhere even forbids practicing favoritism toward them (cf. 23:3; Lev 19:15). This is not because they are not to be avenged, but because He Himself will avenge them. There will be no courtroom, where the rich can use his status or rely on his high-dollar lawyer. The Lord, in His grace, will hear the cries that no one else hears, and He will answer with the fullness of divine wrath. This should encourage us when we are mistreated and warn us against ever mistreating another.

Whom do you know of, who has no status, defender, or advocate? What must you be careful not to do toward them? What is their life like? Who else is already noticing that and responding to it?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for being gracious, for hearing when we cry, and for avenging when we are wronged. Forgive us for when we forget this about ourselves and despair, or forget this about others and mistreat them. Make us to be more like You, Whom we know most fully in the Lord Jesus, in Whose Name we ask it, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP24 "The Earth and the Riches" or TPH174 "The Ten Commandments

For more Hopewell @Home devotionals, please visit bit.ly/harpCHAH

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Exodus 22 verses 21 through 27. These are God's words. You shall neither mistreat. A stranger nor oppress him For your strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child If you afflict them in any way and they cry at all. To me, I will surely hear their cry and my wrath will become hot and I will kill you with the sword.

Your wives shall be widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to any of my people who are poor among you, you still not be like a money lender to him. It's not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's garment, as a pledge, You shall return it to him before.

The sun goes down for that. Is his only covering it is his garment for his skin? What will he sleep in? And it will be that. When he cries to me, I will hear for I and gracious. So far the reading of God's inspired and inherent worked.

The Lord teaches us to have a special care for the needy and empathy fellow feeling for the needy. Because God himself the sympathetic towards them and takes special note of them. And that of course is the way that God interacts with His creation because compared to him. And actually, it belongs to us as creatures as opposed to him as Creator that we are needy and he is the one.

It was sufficient for all of our needs and therefore we are needy and the Lord puts us in different degrees of need in parts. So that we will learn to imitate him in the sympathy that we have for others in the care that we have for others. So, he commands a special care for the needy.

He says you saw neither mistreat. A stranger nor repressant and verse 21. You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child and you might think, well, of course we're not supposed to mistreat anyone and we're not supposed to oppress anyone and we're not supposed to afflict anyone, but the Lord specifically mentions

it, with, reference to the stranger and the widow and the fatherless child.

So that we will have a special care that will be extra careful not to mistreat the soldier or the widow or the fatherless child and the orphan, and the widow and the stranger are often after this point in Scripture used as a, a way of summarizing into one, all who are needy around us, The Sojourner didn't have status, he didn't own land, he wasn't a member of the tribe.

He didn't come from a big extended family that would be full of advocates who could stand with him in the gate. And so he was missing status the widow or the fatherless child didn't have the husband and father, who would stand for them. And even more, who would provide for them, at least the Sojourner could hire himself out to work the widow and the fatherless child were in and even more dire situation, but these three together are often throughout the rest of scripture grouped together.

As an example of the needy. And the Lord is saying that those who are at particular, providential disadvantage. It's in God's providence that they are in the situation that they are in that. We are supposed to have extra care for that because they don't have someone to stand up for them.

Well, that's actually not exactly true. Is it because what the Lord is saying in these seven verses isn't? He is that he is the one who stands up for them. So on the one hand, you say, well ordinarily there would be a husband and a father and a family that would watch against me and defend the rights of these people against me and since they don't have someone to do that humanly speaking earthly speaking, I will watch against myself.

I will give extra care in their behalf, but on the other hand God is saying, there is actually someone who watches out for them, listens to them. Defends them takes up their case, avenges them and you don't want to cross him because he's me, We see this. Also, for instance, in the proverbs and, and other places.

And so in the first place, he commands us to have a special care for the needy, special carefulness toward them. And that this would come not just mechanically because they need someone who looks out for them because they in God's providence don't have the same advantages and as everyone else or because God will have end, it's not just calculation but he wants us to feel empathy.

He provokes us to put ourselves in their shoes. You see this? At the end of verse 21 for you, we're strangers in the land of Egypt, you know, how it is. You have been in that position and you're not to forget what it's like to be in that position.

And then he provokes us again to put ourselves in their place. In verse 27, he could just say if you take his garment as a pledge, you so return it to him before the sun goes down. But he goes on to say for that is his only covering it is as garment for his skin.

What will he sleep in? And so even the way he describes it, even by the question he asks he's he's saying put yourself in his place, you you've worked all day in in the heat your your neighbor is needy and and he's worked all day in the heat to try to make up the money to pay you back what you have loaned to him.

But in the massive temperature changes that take place from day to night in that place. Now, it's nighttime and he needs that cloak. He needs that that outer garment to wrap around himself, You know what? It's like when you're freezing and you can't get warm at night. You can't sleep even though you're exhausted and when he feels that he'll remember, oh my cloak is with my neighbor who has his own and now he has mine too and he cry out to God for justice for vengeance.

And the Lord says, I will hear him. So he teaches us not just to be careful, not to mistreat them and not just to be careful that we don't gain an advantage by them says if you loan them money don't loan them money in order to make money off of them?

The way creditors do he says, if you take his garment as collateral his outer coat is collateral, You don't keep it from that point. Until it's paid off. You give it back to him every night because he needs it to sleep in. He needs it to cover him for warmth on his bed.

Don't you don't gain advantage from him. So the special care but then he also tells us about it in such a way as to provoke our empathy to provoke our sympathy.

That's because God himself is sympathetic In verse 23. He says, I will surely hear their cry and we have three doublings of the verbs here. If afflicting you afflict them and crying, they cry to me hearing, I will hear their cry. Now it's one thing for the man who afflicts to be doing that in great earnestness and it's one thing for the, the man who cries to cry in great earnestness.

But then when God says hearing, I will hear their cry. He reminds us that he's an empathetic. God. He also uses language that connects with us when he says I and my wrath will become hot. Now, we know that there are never any changes in God, He's infinite eternal and unchangeable in his being.

He's not subject to his emotions. So what does he saying? When he says, my wrath will become hot. He's saying that God in his perfect consistency and perfect stability. Responds per in, perfect consistency, with his character and God, as of such a character that he hates and is furious with injustice.

And so there is something that he commands in us, that imitates him in being empathetic sympathetic towards one another, not just that we would learn how to behave that. That we would learn to care from the heart and sympathize that we would, because we are subject to change, aren't we?

That we would learn to be indignant and behalf of those who are taking advantage of that, we would sympathize with them. And that we would remember that God's graciousness and his vengeance go together. Which means that if someone is unjust towards towards someone, that is an object of the Lord's, special care.

God's being gracious. To them means he will be vengeful with us or you will punish us.

And so he says it will be that when he cries to me, I will hear for. I am gracious and we say, oh well that's good, he's gracious. Well, listen to what he says at the end of verse 23 and into verse 24, I will surely hear their crier hearing.

I will hear their cry and my wrath will become hot and I will kill you with the sword. Your wives will be with us, Your children fatherless and so God's graciousness towards His people means he is an avenging. God, This is of course, the thing that keeps us from taking vengeance on others, ourselves.

Do not avenge yourself. Leave room for the wrath of God for. He says vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord, So if you're enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink and in doing so. You will he burning coals? Which burning coals The burning coals of God's wrath upon his head.

So God himself takes vengeance because he is gracious. So a society that knows God, which is what Israel was supposed to be, which is what our household is

supposed to be, which is what his church is supposed to be a society. That knows, God will have special care for the needy and the disadvantaged.

And they will have empathy. Not just actions of care. But thoughts and feelings of care. The, the ability and the habit of putting themselves and other people's shoes and remembering and feeling what it's like to be them because we belong to a god who is sympathetic with us and he listens, and he cares, and because he is gracious towards us.

He takes vengeance. When we are wronged, So let us ask the Lord to help us. Not be those who are wronged. And then when we are wronged to remember that, we can cry out to him and he will hear us because he is gracious and he will be furious even if nobody else sees and nobody else's furious in our bath.

The Lord will be. Let's pray our Father in heaven. We thank you for this portion of your word. We find that We have not put ourselves and others place like we ought to and we're not reflecting very well. What kind of God you are? And what kind of God you are to us.

We pray, Lord that you would help us to be careful of others and especially those who are at a disadvantage or who are needy, We pray, Lord that you would help us to be sympathetic. We thank you that you are sympathetic just, and we pray Lord, that when we are in the disadvantaged or the needy place.

When we are wrong, that we would remember your sympathy with us and that you hear us when we cry and that we would cry out to you and that knowing your vengeance on our behalf because you are gracious that you would free us to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us, help us Lord to live.

According to this portion of your word, thank you for making us to know you as our Father in Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.