

***Deuteronomy 24:17-22 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. That is why I am commanding you to do this. (22)***

Dear Christian friends,

Show of hands...how many of you like leftovers? I don't mean willing to eat leftovers. I mean actually like leftovers, like, you like them better than the first time 'round...leftovers. You know the kind I mean...the rubbery, near re-crunchifying glob of leftover mac & cheese, or the reheated and crisp-drying tater-tot hotdish, or the chili warmed so many times that the hamburger, beans and crushed tomatoes are little different in texture than the onions, peppers, and chili powder.

Of course, don't think that I didn't notice the hands that weren't raised, the heads that aren't nodding along, the bodies that are cringing and shuddering at the thought of rubbery mac & cheese. Yes, there are some of us who would rather go hungry than choke down the shriveled, dehydrated yet somehow soggy remains of a previous meal. You're the kind of people we're talking about today with our theme of *Leftover Generosity* because when it comes to leftovers, you're ready and willing to say, "No, go ahead. *You* can have the leftovers. *I'll* make something else."

Actually, that "selfless" attitude has nothing to do with the *Leftover Generosity* our Lord is talking about in our text for today. In fact, he's talking about purposefully being generous with what you have in such a way that even the so-called "leftovers" are a grateful and fragrant offering to him. And as we consider the Lord's kind of *Leftover Generosity*, please, join me in prayer...

As we begin our text, the God of free and faithful grace is speaking to his people Israel during the early days of their freedom from captivity in Egypt. This is an important point to remember. You see, in recent weeks the Lord had spectacularly brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt with signs and wonders.

He had heard their cries for deliverance and responded in love and power. He had shown his control over creation, his power over enemies, and his love for captives. He had released them from their bondage, brought them literally through the waters safely to the other side, and established them as the promised nation independent of their oppressors. Now, in the safety of the wilderness at the foot of Mt. Sinai, all Israel gathers to hear of the covenant that is to be established between them and their all-powerful, all-loving Lord.

As I said, this is an important point, that Israel, at this moment, receives from the Lord his moral, civil, and ceremonial laws. Known as the Law of Moses, these laws would govern every aspect of life for the Israelites, including, as we see in our text, the Lord's loving providence in his *civil* law for the foreigners, the orphaned, the widowed, and the destitute of Israelite society.

Again, it is important to note that this command from the Lord was no afterthought, no later amendment, no gross oversight resulting in necessary correction. It wasn't like there was a growing problem of poverty that suddenly needed addressing through legislation. No, God, right from the start, lays it all out in unambiguous language – moral law, ceremonial law, civil law – all with perfect clarity for the good of his people. Right from the start, God's people were to be mindful and generous towards the destitute.

But notice that the God of free and faithful grace doesn't combine his expectation of generosity, his *command* for kindness, with a threat. There is no "...or else." No, he identifies those in need and then helps his people to understand the generosity of *his* heart as motivation for *their* hearts to be generous as a part of daily life. He says, ***Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, but the LORD your God redeemed you from there.*** In other words, he says, "1) remember how bad you had it; 2) remember how generously you were released from it; and 3) remember how you felt after it. Now, give that same relief, that same joy, that same sense of gratitude to

those in need as an expression of your own gratitude for all that I have done for you.”

And then he continues by giving them specific ways to express their attitude of gratitude through daily life, through *Leftover Generosity*: ***When you harvest the crops in your field and you forget a bundle in the field, do not return to get it. It will be for the benefit of the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything your hands do.*** <sup>20</sup>***When you beat your olives off the tree, do not strip the boughs clean of olives. Some are to be left for the benefit of the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.*** <sup>21</sup>***When you cut grapes from your vineyard, do not go over it again. Leave some for the benefit of the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.***

You see, as always, the Lord wants the hearts of his people. With practical, everyday opportunities, the Lord gave his people specific ways to be generous. As he blessed his people bountiful harvests, he wanted them to have such an attitude of gratitude that, even as they would joyfully receive his generosity, they would be joyfully generous themselves, sharing the Lord’s generosity with others.

Oh sure, there would be every opportunity to increase their own abundance by grinding every last grain and pressing every last olive and grasping every last grape. There would also be every opportunity to thoughtlessly waste the wheat and sloppily comb the branches and carelessly cut the clusters. Neither attitude has place in a generous heart. No, a generous heart recognizes every grain, every berry, every grape as a blessing from the Lord to be used, not in covetousness or carelessness, but in generousness for his purposes.

Oh, if only it were that easy, huh? If only you had such means that you could be generous in any and every way whenever the opportunity came along. If only you had the means to write that check to the inner-city soup kitchen or to hand out cash to the beggar at the freeway off ramp. If only you had more, well, then you could be more generous.

Then again, if only there was a system today that you could trust so that you could be as generous as those Old Testament Israelites. I mean today, you never know where the money goes. It could be into salaries for administration, or liquor stores for booze, or worse yet, maybe the individual isn’t truly in need and is only taking advantage of your generosity. I mean, it isn’t good stewardship to squander God’s blessings. After all, another opportunity might come along where someone is truly in need and what then?

Of course, you might have already realized that this was Civil law for Old Testament believers and, therefore, no longer applicable to our lives. Jesus lived under these laws of Moses and fulfilled all righteousness. So, I don’t need to leave some my cherry tomatoes on the vine. No one in need is going to come along and eat them anyway!

And its true, Jesus did come to fulfill the law. He lived the perfect life that we couldn’t. He had all the right attitudes, the right actions, the right responses, and the right help at all the right times. And then he gave not just generously, but completely, to those in need, giving his very life for the needy like you and me. Just as he said to the Israelites, he says former spiritual slaves like you and me ***Remember that you were a slave [to sin], but the LORD your God redeemed you*** leaving you with nothing but the perfection of his Son and leaving you with a guaranteed place in the Promised Land of eternal life rather than eternal destruction. In other words *Leftover Generosity*. You and me, left with eternal blessing and...

...now, left with an attitude of gratitude in our hearts for his generosity, we can’t help but live this same *Leftover Generosity* in every phase of life just as our heavenly Father has been generous with us. In his *Peoples Bible* on Deuteronomy, author Mark Braun references 1 John 3:16 – ***Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we also should lay down our lives for our brothers.*** He then cites author William E. Diehl’s *Thank God It’s Monday*:

*If we affirm that God is concerned about all his creation, then there is no area of society where the priestly role (the human link of gospel love between God and others) and is not needed. If God cares about justice, then there is need to be Christians carrying out their priestly roles in the political, economic, and social structures of our society. If God cares about the sick and infirm, then there need to be Christians working in the field of health care. God's concern for prisoners is expressed through Christians working in the criminal justice system. If God is to come to the aid of the poor, it will be through the efforts of concerned Christians working in the economic, political, and social institutions of our culture. (p.131,132)*

You see, *Leftover Generosity* isn't about the specific ways you are generous. Rather, it's about the generosity of your heart, a heart loved and redeemed by the Lord.

And you know, right here, I could say "Amen" and we could all leave moved by the loving generosity of the Lord to be generous with others. But this is how generous our Lord is: he gives even more.

Did you catch it in the middle of our text? As you respond to God's generosity in gratitude with *Leftover Generosity* for others, God will  **bless you in everything your hands do** . Succinctly: God blesses generously. We respond with gratitude by being generous in return. And then, he blesses us even more. Which, just results in more gratitude and more generosity and more blessing and more gratitude and more generosity... Here's what the Lord promises:

- **Psalm 112:5** Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice.
- **Proverbs 11:25** A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.
- **Proverbs 22:9** A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.
- **2 Corinthians 9:6,11** Whoever sows generously will also reap generously... You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and

through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Blessing, generosity, blessing, generosity...you get the picture. But just in case you need one more encouragement towards *Leftover Generosity*...

It was a dark time in the history of Israel. Everyone did as they saw fit. God's people regularly slipped away from him, pursuing the empty promises of false and foreign gods. The Lord would lovingly discipline his people in order to bring them back. Forgiveness would be followed by generosity only to have the cycle repeated yet again.

It was during this dark time that a famine struck the land. In order to feed themselves, a God-fearing family headed West from Bethlehem to the land of Moab where the high plains were still receiving rain. While there, the two sons married women from that country, but the father and sons died ten years later, leaving the moth-in-law, by the name of Naomi, and daughters-in-law as widows. One daughter-in-law, by the name of Ruth, headed back with Naomi to Bethlehem in the land of Judah. The rain had once again begun to fall and they hoped to find some support and charity among the relatives.

Already leaving her own people for the sake of her mother-in-law, Ruth did not want Naomi to suffer the indignity of taking advantage of our text for today. Ruth went herself to gather the leftover grain that fell in the fields. Already known by reputation for her generosity to her mother-in-law and now noticed by her actions for her humility and respect, the owner of the field, Boaz, was so moved that he was even more generous with Ruth and Naomi.

Long story short, Naomi was blessed through the generosity of Ruth and Boaz. Boaz and Ruth were blessed with each other in marriage. And you and I are blessed through them. Because you see, Ruth and Boaz were the grandparents of King David and centuries later, in King David's line, would be born Jesus, the Savior of the world. Yes, *Leftover Generosity*, thanks be to God. Amen.