

Exodus 22:1-31

As we open our Bibles to **Exodus chapter 22**, we find ourselves looking at the very heart of God's social design. Now, some people look at these "case laws" and think they are just dry, ancient regulations. But, when you look closer, you see the character of a God who is passionately interested in true justice—not the kind of "justice" we often see today that protects the predator and forgets the prey, but a justice that seeks to make the victim whole.

Restoration, Not Just Retribution

In the first few verses, God establishes the principle of restitution. If a man steals an ox and kills or sells it, he doesn't just go to jail; he restores five oxen for that one ox.

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep." (Exodus 22:1)

You see, God's law was interested in the innocent party. Today, our system seems obsessed with the "rights" of the criminal while the victim is left picking up the pieces. We see cases where evidence is tossed out on technicalities even when the crime is heinous, leaving the victim twice-violated. But God says there must be a return to balance. If you take from your neighbor, you don't just "say sorry"—you make it right, and then some.

Ownership and Responsibility

The Lord goes on to discuss everything from field fires to borrowed donkeys. If your livestock wanders into a neighbor's field and eats their harvest, you give them the best of your own field. If you start a fire to clear thorns and it spreads to your neighbor's grain, you are responsible.

This speaks to personal responsibility. We live in a "blame-shift" generation where nothing is ever anyone's fault. But God's Word teaches that we are stewards of what He has given us, and our stewardship includes how we affect those around us. If you borrow something and it breaks under your watch, you make it good. It's about integrity in the small things.

Protection for the Vulnerable

Perhaps the most stirring part of this chapter is where God warns those who would take advantage of the weak.

"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot..." (Exodus 22:22-24)

God is the Defender of the defenseless. It breaks my heart to see "religious" charlatans today who prey on the elderly and the poor. They send out those slick, computer-generated letters saying, *"I was praying for you, Mabel, and I feel you have a need... now send me your last twenty-five dollars."* It's a sham! They are making merchandise of God's people.

Let me tell you, when that widow cries out to God because she can't afford bread after giving to some "ministry" shark, God hears her. And according to this passage, He takes it personally. God is gracious, but He is also a Judge.

A Challenge for the Believer

For those of us who walk with the Lord, this chapter is a call to holiness in our horizontal relationships. It's easy to say we love God, whom we haven't seen, while we are being dishonest or careless with our neighbor, whom we see every day.

- Are you a person of your word? Do you seek to make things right when you've caused a loss? Do you look out for the "stranger, widow, and fatherless" in your sphere of influence?

We are called to be a holy people, set apart. Our lives should reflect the graciousness of the God we serve.

An Invitation to Life

Finally, we see that under this Law, the price for sin was high. There was a constant need for restitution and sacrifice. But, we know that we have all "stolen" from God's glory. We have all broken His standards. We could never pay back what we owe to a holy God.

That is why Jesus Christ came. He didn't come to just give us a new set of rules; He came to pay a debt He didn't owe because we had a debt we couldn't pay.

- The Sacrifice: When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He was making the ultimate restitution for your sins and mine.
- The Victory: His resurrection from the dead is the receipt that the payment was accepted. It declares to the whole universe that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

If you are tired of trying to "make it right" on your own, if you feel the weight of your past or the emptiness of a life lived for yourself, Jesus is calling you today. He wants to take your brokenness and give you His righteousness.