

Cherishing the Breath of Life: 3. Protective Justice in a World of Human Distress

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bibles and to God's words to read together from the Old Testament and from the book of Deuteronomy. If you have a visitor's Bible, you'll find Deuteronomy chapter 21 is on page 163.

Page 163. We're continuing our studies in this great exposition of God's instruction for life, for the way of life in his land, in his kingdom of grace.

And the last few weeks, we've been looking at this section from chapter 19, which goes through to nearly the end of, or midway through chapter 22, which is all about cherishing the breath of life, expanding and applying the implications of the sixth commandment, to honor life, to not kill wantonly, but to cherish life.

And so here we come to a chapter that speaks of many different situations of human distress, but each one of them, each paragraph, is concerned with bringing justice to protect life.

So Deuteronomy 21 and verse 1. If in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess, someone is found slain, lying in open country, and it's not known who killed him, then your elders and your judges shall come out, and they shall measure the distance to the surrounding cities.

[1 : 27] And the elders of the city that is nearest to the slain man shall take a heifer that has never been worked and that hasn't pulled a yoke, and the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to the valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley.

And the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to them and to bless in his name the name of the Lord. And by their word, every dispute and every assault shall be settled.

And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. And they shall testify, Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it shed.

Accept atonement, O Lord, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed. And do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, so that their blood guilt be atoned for.

So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord. When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God gives them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her to be your wife, and you bring her to home to your house, she shall shave her head and pair her nails, and she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured, and shall remain in your house, and lament her father and mother a full month.

[3 : 07] After that, you may go into her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. But if you no longer delight in her, you shall let her go where she wants.

But you shall not sell her for money, nor shall you treat her as a slave, since you have humiliated her. If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn, in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn.

But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him, and bring him out to the elders of the city, at the gate of the place where he lives.

And they shall say to the elders of the city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey our voice. He is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones.

[4 : 43] So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear and fear. And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, even his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.

You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, please turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 21, page 163, if you have one of the blue visitor's Bibles.

As we've been seeing so clearly in these chapters, our God is the Lord and giver of life. The Bible opens, doesn't it, with the creation of a world teeming with life, made by God and made principally for man.

And the great tragedy, of course, is the intrusion of death, which spoils and vitiates all life, brings death and decay to this whole world, a world in which man is estranged, separated from God.

[6 : 07] But, of course, the Bible ends with a great reversal of death, with the renewal of life everlasting. If you read the very last chapter of the Bible, you'll see it's filled with references to the water of life that flows out of the throne of God for all who thirst for life.

At the center is the tree of life, whose leaves and whose fruit are for the healing of all the nations of this world. And the curse of death is no more, because sin and evil, which are the cause of death, is no more.

It has been overcome by the Lion of Judah, by the Lamb who was slain, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the hope in which we are saved. But, of course, it is still a future hope.

And until Jesus comes again to reign, as Paul says in Romans 8, the whole creation is still groaning. And even as God's redeemed, we must live, mustn't we, in still sinful bodies and in a still suffering world where death still intrudes, because we're waiting still for our full salvation, for the redemption of our bodies.

But, you see, wherever God's kingdom is being manifest in this world, there will be that love for life and a cherishing of the very breath of life, and especially the life of human beings made in the very image of God himself.

[7 : 31] And that's why we have these chapters that we've been studying in Deuteronomy 19 to 22, which are really opening up the implications of that sixth commandment. You shall not murder, you shall not kill carelessly or wantonly.

That is, you shall cherish the life of God in man, who is the image of God. So even in a fallen world, as we've seen, there must be, for God's people, balanced justice in a world of mistakes and malice.

That's what we saw in chapter 19. And there must be honorable justice to preserve the joy of life even in a world that is constantly at war with God and there has to be battles.

And now here in chapter 21, likewise, there must be protective justice in a world which still knows so much human distress as it groans waiting for its full redemption.

And wherever God's people are, wherever his kingdom is being manifest, his realm must be seen to be a realm of life and a place where life is guarded and cherished.

[8 : 43] Notice the verses that bracket this chapter, verse 1 and the last verse. The focus is on God's land, isn't it? The land of his people's possession, verse 1.

In verse 23, it must be an undefiled land because God is giving it as an inheritance. It's God's realm of life and therefore it must not be polluted.

It mustn't be defiled by death. Verse 8 and 9, it mustn't be defiled by innocent blood and the guilt of innocent blood. Or verse 21, it mustn't be defiled by any evil that threatens to harm and destroy life.

Right from the very beginning, God's realm has been the realm of life. And of course, these chapters must have a great deal therefore to teach us today for the Christian church because back then, Israel as a land was the beachhead, wasn't it, of God's everlasting kingdom.

But now, since the triumph, since the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has sent his church into all the world to claim all the world for him, to proclaim his victory to all nations, to bring his rule to the very uttermost parts of the earth.

[10 : 01] And the church of Christ, we're told, is to be a light to the world. Paul says, we're to be a pillar and buttress of truth in a world that is dark and decaying to show it the way of life, to demonstrate a love for life that is the only way to bring true human flourishing, to bring life as it's meant to be.

And so, if we will listen to God's word here, then we will find his instruction. We'll find principles that will bless, not only bless and beautify the church of Christ, but if it will listen, bless and beautify this whole world.

So let's look at these five sections, then, in our chapter that teach God's people to cherish life by insisting on protective justice in these different situations of human distress that, alas, are still so common in our fallen world.

First of all, in verses 1 to 9, the situation is that of an unsolved murder. And the issue is ensuring justice that will protect the dignity of the remnants of life and protect the reputation of those living who are tainted by that killing.

So a body is found, presumably murdered, but you see, the crime is unsolved. But it just will not do to say, well, there's nothing we can do about that.

[11 : 26] No, a human being has been killed. And so, as God says, way back in Genesis chapter 9, he requires a reckoning for every life. We looked at Numbers 35 the other week and verse 33 there is explicit.

Blood pollutes the land, says God. And no atonement can be made for the land except by the blood of the one who has shed it. But you see, in this case here, the killer is unknown.

And hence, this elaborate ritual that takes the heifer to the valley bottom filled with a river and kills it ceremoniously. Perhaps to indicate a vicarious execution.

So as to say, well, we are honoring the dignity of this human life by proclaiming a life for a life. Perhaps that was it. Or certainly, as verse 6 symbolizes, it is to enact a washing away of the guilt of innocent blood and a declaration of innocence.

You wonder if Pontius Pilate had read this chapter, don't you? Although his hand washing of the, a washing away of the blood of Jesus was an altogether more cynical affair.

[12 : 40] Now we may not be able to fathom all the details exactly of this ritual here, but surely it teaches us two things that are abundantly plain. First, is that God views human life as having absolute sanctity.

And every single taking of innocent human life must receive a reckoning. just think how differently our world today thinks about these things.

Increasingly in our society, we assume, don't we, that human life is ours to decide to do with it as we please. So the mark of a truly civilized society, as we've said before, is that we have freely available abortion, for example, the taking, willfully, of innocent human life.

increasingly, we want, it seems, freely available euthanasia to be like Holland where nearly 5% of every death in that country is caused by assisted suicide.

Can you believe that? But that's what we want in this country. And it's all in the name of compassion and humanitarianism. But are human beings more compassionate and more humanitarian than God who made us in his image?

[13 : 56] Do you see, the problem is that when you systematically airbrush God out of your thinking, then ultimately, all morality will end up at sea. As somebody's put it, ours is a horizontal relationship society.

No thought of God. And it's this that turns its humanitarianism and compassion into a heartless and ruthless attack on the sanctity and sacredness of human life itself.

And earns it the sad and tragic reputation of being, in essence, a disposable society. But no, God says, all human life is sacred.

And therefore, it follows secondly, doesn't it, that God holds people corporately responsible for all human killing. All these townspeople are involved in this whether they like it or not, says the Lord.

Again, that's something we find so very difficult to understand in our highly individualistic culture. We feel, don't we, that murder and killings and terrorism, whatever it is, is nothing to do with us. But according to God, none of us can distance ourselves from these things.

[15 : 11] Society's sins are our sins. There is, as Margaret Thatcher once said and was so misquoted on, there is no such thing as society out there that we can blame as though we had nothing to do with it.

That's something that we're just beginning, I think, to take seriously in our country today, isn't it, in this world of terrorism where Muslim communities in the West are having to realize that terrorists don't just spring up out of nowhere, they come out of communities and there is corporate responsibility.

As there is, friends, for every one of us in our society for all the murders, all the abortions, all the violence, all the defiling of human life in our midst. It's not good blaming the government, it's not good blaming the Prime Minister or the President of the United States or whoever else is your bet noire.

We are the democratic society that rules our nation through our representatives. And our society is a society which, as one scholar puts it, says, shedding innocent blood has become a fact of life, silently sanitized by statistics.

Isn't that right? But our society doesn't see any need, it seems, for these cleansing rituals that would acknowledge our responsibility in these things.

[16 : 42] But the Church of Jesus Christ surely, at least, should be a place where together we cherish the sanctity of all innocent life, especially the most vulnerable, where we show a different way to the world.

Knowing that we all share a responsibility to God to ensure that that is so in His Church and to do everything in our power to make it so in our society where we can.

Real compassion, real humanity, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated so perfectly, real humanity cherishes life and loves life, loves to bring healing and restoration and rescue to life and mourns and weeps in the face of every innocent life that is taken by man.

And that's such an important lesson for us to learn and to heed from this first section here in our chapter this morning. But second, look at verses 10 to 14 which turns to the case of an uprooted woman.

And the issue here is again ensuring protective justice in this case for a vulnerable life. Here it's a captive woman who's caught in the aftermath of war and if you think something like this is irrelevant to us today, just read the horrific stories of what has happened to women in the territories taken by ISIS in the Middle East.

[18 : 06] Or indeed the equally terrible reprisals that are happening now as the Iraqi and other forces are pushing ISIS out and reprisals are taking place among those who are considered to be collaborators.

Again, terrible things happening especially to women. And so it has been and so it still is all too frequently in the modern wars that we have today just as it was commonplace in the ancient world here.

Bob mentioned the other week, didn't he? The Assyrian tablets in the British Museum and my goodness the Assyrians had the most infamous reputation for what they did. to the peoples they conquered.

Rape and pillage and horrible, horrible things especially to women. But not so here for God's people and God's soldiers notice.

Please do notice this if you're somebody who's imbibed the entirely false idea of the Old Testament being a license for abuse and mistreatment of women. As though the Old Testament was no different for some of the worst excesses of Sharia law today.

[19 : 10] The opposite is true friends. This law here look at it it is written to protect the vulnerable captive women. To restrict and to restrain the power of the victorious soldier.

The situation is post-battle and you'll remember won't you from chapter 20 that enemies like this were only to be fought by Israel if they first of all refused the terms of peace which was always to be Israel's first response.

But no they've refused and there's been battle and the men have been killed and so the women are left vulnerable and destitute. In that time the situation was very bleak for them in that kind of situation.

Poverty starvation or perhaps at best slavery or prostitution to be used by victorious men but not so here do you see. If a soldier finds a woman that he does find beautiful he is not to enslave her not to just take her verse 11 he's to marry her he's to give her all the privileges of an Israelite wife.

By the way this makes clear doesn't it that the marrying of foreign women the banning on that that we saw in chapter 7 was not at all a racial thing it wasn't banning interracial marriages it was banning marriage into pagan idolatry but here this is the opposite isn't it?

[20 : 39] The woman is marrying into the Israelite community and the Israelite faith. That's the point of all the procedure there in verses 12 and 13. There's utter clarity about her total conversion from her previous life leaving her father and mother and her community becoming a new person in Israel beginning a new life.

That's what all the shaving of the head and the paring of the nails seems to signify it's a mourning ritual but there's compassion along with that clarity. She's given time to mourn to adjust it's a traumatic transition and notice that time is not spent as a homeless refugee as a prisoner verse 13 her captive's clothes are removed she's given a place properly in her new home in her new family but she's safe she's not to be touched there's no sexual approach until that time of mourning and transition has passed only then have been given as a woman the true dignity that she deserves as an equal human being only then is marriage to take place and then it's to take place properly and publicly just like any other marriage you see and verse 14 notice if during that 28 day cooling off period the man decides oh dear

I've made a mistake I don't want to marry her after all there's no getting a full refund this is not John Lewis or Marks and Spencer's nor do you just cut your losses by putting her up for sale or making her a slave it's not eBay either look no no no she is a free woman she goes where she pleases because after everything that she's gone through if you don't make her properly an honest woman as your wife you've humiliated her and so you will take the loss not her thus says Christopher Wright the physical and emotional needs of the woman in her utter vulnerability are given moral and legal priority over the desires and claims of the man in his victorious strength the case could be written up as a matter of human rights Deuteronomy characteristically prefers to express it as a matter of responsibilities and as such he says its relevance is clearly applicable beyond the realm of war to all kinds of analogous situations of weakness and power indeed so and we might well reflect how much less misery and exploitation there would be in our own very modern and sophisticated society if men were taught and indeed made to bear their proper responsibilities towards women there's no use men complaining about so many of the absurdities and excesses that sometimes have come from the modern secularist feminist movement when the truth is what men listen to this the truth is that the women's rights movement has arisen in part at least because men have not taken their proper responsibilities towards women so often men have not lived up to being real men proper men that use their greater physical strength not to protect and honor women but to pray on them and to humiliate them but of course as our society drifts further and further from the sanity of biblical truth in every sphere of life including this one there's less and less hope of men or anybody else bearing their proper responsibilities because there's no God to whom we have to be responsible so it just does become a battle of one group asserting their rights over another rather than wanting to fulfill their responsibilities towards another under God and the escalating utter confusion in this whole realm of gender can only make things worse still because we want there not even to be men and women

I saw the latest BBC program was to be called for children no boys and girls we just want there to be fluidity and self identification well if that's so what hope is there for men ever being real men and bearing the responsibility that God has given them to protect and to nurture and to light in women as women so that they can be safe and valued so they can flourish as women alongside men in that proper harmonious partnership that God himself has given us to reflect the perfect harmony within the triune God himself what a mess our modern world is in with western society now faced on the one hand with disintegration of gender identity under the assault of our secularist ideology and at the same time how ironic at the same time the vast influx of Islamist ideology into Europe from the

Middle East and North Africa and a huge rise in sexual violence against women by men whose attitude is the very antithesis of the biblical gentleness that we see here I've been reading Douglas Murray's book *The Strange Death of Europe* and let me tell you it is a very frightening read indeed our media suppresses it and indeed our politicians suppress it but the truth is the Islamification of Europe through mass immigration has had a horrific impact on women especially in countries like Sweden and Germany there are towns in Germany today where the mayors of the towns have warned women never to go outside their houses on their own and when they do even accompany by a man to be covered from head to toe because otherwise they will be seen to be inviting sexual assault was there ever a greater need for the church of Jesus Christ to shine light and truth as a pillar and buttress of truth and sanity in a world that is so utterly confused and lost and dark in this whole area of relations between the sexes men

[27 : 00] Christian men this is a time for us to man up to show the world what real masculinity is like in relation to women not to be more effeminate not to be more gender neutral but to be strong and manly and soldier like yes fighting battles at times for what is right against what is wrong but at the same time showing this gentleness and kindness and compassion that is ready to exceed to the emotional needs of women and to the physical needs of women who need our protection now if you're a married man here this morning as a Christian you need to reflect that right protective justice in your marriage and if you're not then you also need to show the same responsible attitude and if you're a man you've got to do that when a woman catches your eye as beautiful and you think well

I might want to make her my wife don't treat her badly don't humiliate her that's God's word to you yes there are going to be times aren't there when two people start a friendship and they think it might lead to something more but the delight does go out of it and it doesn't lead to marriage well that's fine but men usually not always but it and the older she is the harder it is for her when that happens don't humiliate her the more public that relation is the harder it will be if that relationship ends and so you have to think carefully about how you conduct a relationship with a woman it's wise to show discretion especially in early stages to avoid that it's the wise thing to be discreet until at least there's a that won't happen and let me say a godly

Christian church I think will be one where a bloke knows that his friends will give him a severe hiding if he mistreats and humiliates a girl like that and if his friends won't that his pastor will and he will so I hope you're listening one more thing here do note this understanding this compassion for the outsider as she leaves her pagan past as she becomes part of the Lord's people there is clarity as I said when somebody does that even today when you become a Christian you have to leave your past behind and that's difficult and sometimes it means leaving powerful relationships behind and that is hard and we do well to recognize that don't we as a Christian church and to help people make that transition not make it harder for them we need to give people time we need to be gentle with people especially if it's not just a change of faith but if it is a change of country and a great change of culture that they're making that is now often the case in our church here isn't it with many coming to us and coming to Christ from very different cultures indeed and surely like here we need to welcome people fully into their new household and help them to adjust to their new life not as outsiders but as insiders from within their new family it's among

God's people isn't it that people are going to be able to grow as God's people not if they're kept outside as prisoners there's a lot to ponder isn't there in these verses about the uprooted woman and likewise in verses 15 to 17 which dwell on the case of the unfair father and once again it's protective justice this time for the unloved life if a man has two wives well then almost certainly there's going to be a problem of favoritism that's why of course the Bible consistently teaches monogamy from Genesis right to Jesus but of course this is a fallen world for all kinds of reasons people make wrong choices and they end up having to live with the consequences of those choices and you see God's law is for the real world which is a world of sin and a world of mess God doesn't just respond to difficult situations by saying see I told you so that's what sanctimonious people do but no

God's law seeks to deal with the mess and protect those who are involved especially those who are innocently involved in the cross fire and again this is still very relevant today bigamy polygamy is still illegal in our country but of course in some countries it's normal and many come into our country with many wives and under Sharia law which seems to be more and more common in parts of our country it's happening all around us increasingly and it happens also in our own so-called British culture see in Moses day if you grew tired of one wife you kept her and you added another one perhaps today you just don't keep her you move on to the next one and so there are huge numbers aren't there of step families in our society today and very often what happens is a man does abandon his wife and his children in the first family goes on and starts another one and all his focus and attention goes on the second one and they forget the first one and God says to you no you can't do that the first born son then had certain rights primogeniture was the norm and he says no your first family does not suffer because your affections have moved on again it's squarely aimed at men isn't it the man has responsibility not to be swayed by his affections into rank injustice but it's a story of Jacob and his two wives reminds us of course that women are not always entirely blameless remember how

[33 : 06] Leah and Rachel fought tooth and nail with each other for the rights of their own sons and you know the horrible sadness of that story that ended up in attempted murder of brother upon brother oh dear how much better if the if that begins verse 15 here was never the case isn't that so what's the word that dominates this paragraph unloved isn't that the root of so much pain in our broken society where serial relationships are increasingly the norm and so often broken up families by mobile multiple fathers leave a trail of children with a sense of that word unloved deeply etched upon their hearts and their lives something that will scar them perhaps to the very end of their life isn't that so isn't that one reason at least why there's such a national crisis in the provision of child and adolescent mental health services can't get enough of them should we be surprised because of the unbridled unrestrained selfishness and unfairness of so many fathers towards their unloved offspring and of course we know don't we that that is something that is particularly disastrous for their sons and that brings us to the next paragraph verses 18 to 21 all about the uncontrollable son and again the point here is that there should be protection for the parents who produce new life and for the family unit that nurtures that life see it's not always the parents fault some youth some young men rebel and go bad even though their parents do discipline them as verse 18 here says they do their very best but he becomes stubborn and rebellious and that means not just that this is a naughty boy no no no this is someone of age to assert his own independence persistently rejecting all authority and Derek

Kidner reminds us that obedience to parents is the first test of a man's acceptance of all higher grades of authority and on that acceptance depends all order and stability in society stubborn and rebellious are the words that God uses repeatedly of Israel when they refuse him and turn away from him and do everything that he hates so it's deadly serious language and so if the punishment appears harsh then we need to realize don't we that if the whole cohesion and the preservation of civil society is at stake then sometimes severe sanctions must be applied we recognize that today at this very moment in our country there's a there's a move isn't there to increase radically the punishments the sentences for the crime of throwing acid into people's faces which seems to be rampant people being disfigured for the whole of their lives and rightly there must be stronger punishment but you see the problem is that our whole society's revulsion towards any punishment of children when they're young especially any physical punishment is in fact a huge factor that is producing the levels of criminality that we are seeing in young men today and the truth is that if evil is not purged by those who have responsibility in society and notice here it's the leaders and the whole populace who have responsibility if that doesn't happen then not only the family but the whole of society will be at severe risk so notice here the careful balance between parental authority and the civic responsibility you see the law assumes that family discipline is vital and is primary that parents must discipline their children but the law also limits that authority there is a time that they must involve others family fathers are key but church fathers and civil fathers also are to be involved and in that day they were one and the same thing now the civil authorities of course are separate and their role is to support and back up good family discipline not to undermine it and that's very important isn't it that was the problem with the infamous named person legislation that the SNP government tried to impose here in Scotland that was unbalanced it could so easily have led to good

Christian parents being undermined by civil authorities it had so many sinister possibilities within it that even the Supreme Court likened it to the dangers of a totalitarian regime and that's why they threw it out rightly so and it should be said it was largely due to the campaigning of Christian people that it was done but nevertheless God's word tells us there is a right balance between family and civic responsibility parents are to seek help from outsiders at times not to try and keep things in house when they escalate notice parents here do not have the right to totally take matters into their own hands they don't have the right to apply this extreme punishment that is a matter for the public courts alone and that's still true today the New Testament makes that very clear Paul says it's to governments that God has given the authority to promote good and to punish evil and there are times when we as Christians we have to render to

Caesar the things that are Caesar's to decide that's God's word and Christian churches and Christian organizations haven't always done that they've failed to do that sometimes they've tried to keep things far too much in house most notably of course in the whole situation of child abuse within the church or Christian organizations and rightly the world has criticized and condemned the church for that but God says even within the church and the Christian family there's a time to take verse 19 seriously there's a time to take miscreant sons of the church to face civil authority and the public justice that they deserve and certainly the case of child abuse is one of those well isn't it striking when you actually read the Bible when you give it the courtesy of a little bit of intelligent examination you discover even that its most ancient words are extraordinarily contemporary relevant I wonder if that surprises some of us here this morning what about this last paragraph then in verses 22 and 23 all about the unburied criminal well surely these verses tell us that so greatly does God cherish human life created in his own image that he demands protective justice to limit the defilement on the remains of life even when it is life justly forfeited for a capital crime remember it was only the most heinous severe crimes that were capital crimes in Israel crimes against

God himself and flagrant idolatry crimes against God's image in man in terms of murder or violence or sexual crime that's why I think this rather gruesome picture is tolerated by God it's not death by hanging its execution and then the body being displayed on a tree after death in open view I think it allows God's repugnance of such heinous crime to be seen especially for the violation of human life you'll notice again though it's not something prescribed he says if this is done it was common custom to do that because the very presence of death itself even as judgment upon sin is defilement says verse 23 on God's land on the inheritance that he's given his people where he is the lord of life living in the midst of his people God loves life and he hates death the curse of death and he hates the sin and evil that is the cause of that death and so even the guilty criminal whose public display like this reminds everybody of the curse of sin and the curse of death even the guilty criminal brings forth the compassion of God for his own image in man however vitiated that is so even his body cannot remain all night on the tree subject to further degradation

[41 : 59] God limits even the curse even God's curse on man's sin will not have the last word in God's land you see he curtails his curse for his own sake because it will not have his kingdom defiled forever it will not be defiled even by the just curse of death upon sin because God is the redeemer who is redeeming his people for life isn't that a wonderful picture in these verses of the curse of man's wickedness God's just curse and yet it's it's curtailed it's brought to an end out of commitment to God's own honor and glory for his name as the God of life but this is a chapter all about justice can God be just in curtailing his curse on man's wickedness in that way surely there must be just punishment for wickedness for rebellion or else the whole of God's law is just a sham yes that is so isn't it guilty man must be punished the curse must be spent on man and in man that's why our Bible tells us you see that such is God's commitment to the honor of his name and such is his compassion on those who bear the image of his name that he is the God who at last himself became man in order to bear that curse himself that it might be assuaged curtailed forever never again to defile his land and his kingdom that's the extraordinary message isn't it of the apostle Paul writing to the Galatian church he quotes this very verse and he says just so impaled on a tree Christ the son of God became a curse for us so so that redeemed from the curse of the law God's promise to Abraham would at last be fulfilled so that pagans and Gentiles together could receive the promised Holy Spirit the Spirit who comes into our hearts to make us sons and heirs of the living

God through the Spirit he says by faith we therefore can eagerly await not the curse of sin but the hope of righteousness from the Spirit he says we will reap eternal life not the curse of death but the crown of life because God is the God of life and he will not allow his world to be cursed by death forever even when it is the just curse upon man's sin and wickedness you see what Jesus meant when he said Moses spoke about me when he said all the prophets and the law prophesied until John the Baptist came and said the time has arrived has now come the Christ is here because you see even a chapter like this even with all this human distress and misery and death it tells us doesn't it that this is not the world that

God created this is not the world as God wants it to be and this is not the world that God has purposed it shall be and every provision to protect life in all situations to honor life to honor God's inheritance of life it points us doesn't it to the ultimate goal to the death of death even death that is justly meted out on sinners by God it points us to the end of that curse points us to the day and at last there will be the dawn of life life in all its fullness life everlasting he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither will there be mourning or crying or pain anymore for all these former things have passed away that is the voice from the throne of

God because of what our Lord Jesus Christ came to do and has done aren't you glad that through our Lord Jesus Christ we can rejoice in God's ultimate protective justice in a world of so much human distress that we can rejoice in his glorious kingdom of life well let's pray oh God who declarest thy mighty power most chiefly ensuring mercy and pity mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace that we running the way of thy commandments may obtain thy gracious promises and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure through

[47 : 40] Jesus Christ our Lord Amen oh and are saying well that the earth of thy o