

DEUTERONOMY 15:1–6 SERMON: LOVE THE POOR BECAUSE GOD MADE YOU RICH

1. Deuteronomy 15:1–6 Main Idea

You must regularly seek to eradicate poverty by relieving poor covenant members of their debt.

2. Homiletical Main Idea

Love your less fortunate brothers and sisters in Christ by working to relieve their burden of debt because God has blessed you richly in Christ Jesus.

3. Sermon Outline

- I. Introduction: Poverty and Debt Crush but God Cares
 - A. The weight of poverty in my own experience
 - B. The weight of poverty and debt in Cambodia
 - C. The Principle and Promise of Deut 15:1–6
- II. The Principle: Love by working to relieve debt (Deut 15:1–3)
 - A. Recurring
 - B. Specific
 - C. Restful
- III. The Promise: God has blessed you richly in Christ Jesus (Deut 15:4–6)
 - A. Old Covenant nature of the command
 - B. The New Covenant Fulfillment in Christ
 - C. The Blessing of Deuteronomy 15:4–6
 1. New Covenant Now: Indwelling power of the Spirit
 2. Coming Soon: Future Debt-Free Rest

4. Sermon Transcript

4.1. Introduction: Poverty and Debt Crush but God Cares

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:1–6

At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord's release has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release. But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess— if only you will strictly obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today. For the Lord your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.

Prayer: Give Us a Heart for the Poor

Father, by your Spirit, cause us to delight in all that Jesus is for us and expand our hearts for the poor among us now and in our future ministries.

Introduction: Personal Example and Global Example

This last summer, as many of you know, was a difficult summer for our family. Our only car needed major transmission work, Henri had a growth on the side of his face that the doctors couldn't figure out, our 92 year old "roommate" and "landlord" had terminal lung cancer that gave her less than a month to live. But in the midst of all of that, the most stressful and difficult part of it was our lack of money. For the first time, as a husband and a father, I was looking at a nearly empty bank account. It was humiliating and discouraging. It was always in the back of my mind. I struggled to enjoy anything. Now, compared to most people in the world my situation really wasn't that bad. We had family and friends who could have helped us out if we really got into a bind. And we only had a small amount of debt that we were able to defer repayment on for a year. But even so, it was a crushing burden.

In Cambodia, it is so crushing that parents end up selling their own daughters as sex slaves just to pay off creditors and survive.¹ In an interview, a Cambodian mother said this:

I know that I did wrong so I feel regret about it. It was because of the debt, that's why I had to sell my child. I didn't have a choice... There is no bigger problem than money. All I could think about was finding the money to pay off the debt so the creditors would [leave me alone].

I say all of this to help us feel that debt and poverty are a big deal. You are going to preach to people who are poor and you are going to counsel people who are suffering under the weight of debt. Deuteronomy 15 reminds us that even though debt can crush the poor, we have a God who cares for the poor. He knows their name and their bank account. He cares enough to give his people specific instructions for how to love them and liberate them.

So here is what I think the main message of Deut 15:1–6 is for us:

Love your less fortunate brothers and sisters in Christ by working to relieve their burden of debt because God has blessed you richly in Christ Jesus.

¹ See CNN Freedom Project's video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isYwjJtiorI&ab_channel=CNN

We are going to look at this passage in two parts: (1) The Principle (15:1–3) and (2) The Promise (15:4–6). The principle is the love principle that this law is giving us and the promise is what will empower us to fulfill the love principle.

4.2. The Principle: Love by working to relieve debt (Deut 15:1–3)

Look at verses 1–3. I want to draw attention to three aspects of this command that Moses is giving: (a) It is recurring, (b) specific, and (c) restful.

It is recurring. Look at verse 1. This kind of care for the poor was supposed to be part of the regular rhythm of life. This isn't a one-time-and-check-it-off-the-list kind of thing. This is supposed to be a regular part of community life. In our ministry and life we should not see care for the poor as something we do once or for a season so you can put it on your resume. We need to find ways to make care for the poor a regular part of our ministries and part of the rhythm of our church.

It is specific. This is what I love about the laws in Deuteronomy. They give us love principles but they aren't just love principles. They are detailed and specific. In verse 1, Moses explains when the release is supposed to happen. In verse 2, he explains what is supposed to happen. And in verse 3, he explains who it is supposed to happen to. In seminary, we often speak in general. We often speak abstractly, and we often explain passages without regard to any specific application. Even my own paper for this passage lacked any specific application of this passage. I'm not saying this is a bad thing. It is just a part of seminary and there are advantages to it. But when we leave here we should not be satisfied with generalities, abstractions, and vague application. Work hard to care for the poor in your church in specific ways. Let me give you a few examples:

- Find specific ways to remind yourself, when you are preparing to preach, that there are people in your congregation who are suffering under the weight of poverty and debt.
- Find specific ways to remind yourself, when you are counseling someone, to be sensitive to the fact that debt may be contributing to the stress and struggle in their life.
- Find specific ways for your church to minister to those who are suffering under the weight of poverty and debt. This could include supporting other congregations around the world. We can do a better job of making Christians aware of the circumstances of other believers and how their giving is caring for them.

It is restful. I talk about this in my paper. It seems very likely that Moses is applying a Sabbath principle here. The Sabbath represented rest and order. Just as God brought rest and order to the world through his creative work and brought rest and order to Israel through his redemptive work, God's people should seek to bring rest and order to the poor by releasing them from debt. Don't underestimate the value of this kind of work. Don't look at this and think, "well this is just physical rest and order. It isn't spiritual. It isn't really advancing God's kingdom." How many of us are the recipients of the generosity of other people? How many of us have experienced the rest and order that comes from the provision of donors and without which we would not be able to do what we are doing now?

So the love principle is *recurring, specific, and restful*. Now if this is true for the Old Covenant community then how much more should this be true for our churches?

4.3. The Promise: God has blessed you richly in Christ Jesus (Deut 15:4–6)

Now look at verses 4 and 5. Moses tells them that, even though he is giving them this command, it should not be necessary because God will surely bless them *if* they obey him. Then in verse 6, Moses ramps up God's promise. Not only will he bless them so that there will not be

any poor among them, he is going to bless them so much that they will end up providing for and ruling over other nations.

But as we know, Israel failed to keep the law. Then they failed to care for the poor. They failed to become the great nation that they should have been. They were imprisoned under sin. Cursed by the covenant. And unable earn the blessing that we so desperately need.

It is into this seemingly hopeless situation that God sent his Son to love the poor selflessly the way we should and to bear the curse of poverty that we deserve. He became poor so that we might become rich. He fulfilled the commands of the law so that we can receive the blessing of the law.

4.3.1. The Blessing of Deuteronomy 15:4–6

There are two parts to this blessing. And we need to know both of them if we are going to fulfill the love principle of verses 1–3. There is the “New Covenant Now” and the “Coming Soon”.

A. The New Covenant Now

We find the “New Covenant now” in Acts 2. The Spirit of Christ lives in us now and is here eliminating poverty in the church now. He is doing more than just opening people’s eyes to glory of the gospel. He is creating faith that leads to works. And his desire is to bring relief to the poor through *you*. He isn’t hovering around the church saying, “come on guys! Get to work!” He is actively changing people and changing you to care for the poor among you. He is actively removing the burden of debt. And I think we should expect that the church community does not have any needy persons. We should not accept that there are impoverished congregations around the world. I’m not advocating that you believe in a prosperity gospel but I am advocating that you believe in an Acts 2:45 gospel: “*And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*” Before we as pastors look at our people we need to look at the God who indwells them and remember that nothing is too difficult for him.

B. The Coming Soon

Second, Jesus has purchased a debt-free, eternal, Sabbath rest for all who believe in him. In Richard Baxter’s book, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, he exhorts Christians to meditate on the future glory that God has in store for them. He argues that in order for us to live more obediently and joyfully we must set our minds on the future glory that awaits us. Listen to Baxter: “As you would delight a covetous man by showing him gold, so God delights His people by leading them into heaven, and showing them Himself and their rest with Him. I urge you, reader, in the name of the Lord, and as you value the life of steady joy, to enter upon this work seriously, and learn the art of heavenly-mindedness.”

I exhort you to meditate on your future debt-free eternity of enjoying God and his gifts until all the rest and riches of this world pales in comparison.