

Just Laws for a Fallen World: Property Laws

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[0 : 00] It's good to worship with you again this morning in a new location for the same church family. And if you are new, my name is Sean. I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church.

And we have been going through a series in the book of Exodus. If you don't have a Bible, if you raise your hand, we can get you a copy of the Bible you can use. And if everybody would please turn to Exodus chapter 21.

And we'll be looking at verse 33 to the end of that chapter to chapter 22, verse 15. 21, 33 to 22, 15. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, we gather in your name under the authority of your word every week.

Because we are your people. And in you alone is life. And as you always do, we ask that you address us from your word.

[1 : 26] Teach us. Speak to us. From your timeless word. Into the specific places and seasons of our own individual lives.

That we might be challenged. Comforted. And transformed to be more like Jesus, our Savior. It's in his precious name we pray.

Amen. If you would please stand for the reading of God's word. I will read it out loud for us. Exodus 21, verse 33 and following. When a man opens a pit.

Or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it. And an ox or a donkey falls into it. The owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner and the dead beast shall be his.

When one man's ox butts another's so that it dies. Then they shall sell the live ox and share its price. And the dead beast also they shall share. Or if it is known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past.

[2 : 42] And its owner has not kept it in. He shall repay ox for ox. And the dead beast shall be his. If a man steals an ox or a sheep. And kills it or sells it.

He shall repay five oxen for an ox. And four sheep for a sheep. If a thief is found breaking in. And is struck so that he dies. There shall be no blood guilt for him.

But if the sun has risen on him. There shall be blood guilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing. Then he shall be sold for his theft. If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession.

Whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep. He shall pay double. If a man causes a field or a vineyard to be grazed over. Or lets his beast loose. And it feeds in another man's field.

He shall make restitution from the best in his own field. And in his own vineyard. If fire breaks out and catches in thorns. So that the stacked grain or the standing grain.

[3 : 39] Or the field is consumed. He who started the fire shall make full restitution. If a man gives to his neighbor money or goods to keep safe. And it is stolen from the man's house.

Then if the thief is found he shall pay double. If the thief is not found. The owner of the house shall come near to God. To show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor's property. For every breach of trust.

Whether it is for an ox. For a donkey. For a sheep. For a cloak. Or for any kind of lost thing. Of which one says. This is it. The case of both parties shall come before God.

The one whom God condemns. Shall pay double to his neighbor. If a man gives to his neighbor a donkey. Or an ox. Or a sheep. Or any beast to keep safe. And it dies.

Or is injured. Or is driven away. Without anyone seeing it. An oath by the Lord shall be between them. Both. Between them both. To see whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor's property. The owner shall accept the oath.

[4 : 37] And he shall not make restitution. But if it is stolen from him. He shall make restitution to its owner. If it is torn by beasts. Let him bring it as evidence.

He shall not make restitution for what has been torn. If a man borrows anything of his neighbor. And it is injured or dies. The owner not being with it. He shall make full restitution.

If the owner was with it. He shall not make restitution. If it was hired. He came for its hiring fee. This is God's holy. Authoritative word.

You may be seated. Every society has to come up with some rules for governing property. Whether it's natural resources like land, forests, or water.

Or manufactured goods like cars and computers. Or the means of producing those goods. Like machinery or whatever it might be. Because without rules governing property.

[5 : 36] Cooperating together with other people. Well producing and trading with other people would be virtually impossible. And it will inevitably lead to conflict. I can demonstrate this from the children's playroom.

If you put even young children in a playroom together. You'll inevitably hear these cries. That's mine. Or I had it first. No, that's my birthday present.

There needs to be some kind of rules in place. To regulate how people relate to property. And to one another's property. Because without it society cannot function.

Ancient Israel was no exception. As we see here in this passage. But is there a distinctly biblical. And Christian ethic. When it comes to the governance of property.

And this passage shows us that indeed there is. Especially when we understand and apply this passage through the lens of Jesus who fulfilled all of scriptures. And the main point that I want to drive home this morning is this.

[6 : 40] That as those to whom God has bestowed the riches of his grace. We should live with sacrificial generosity toward our neighbors. And I'm going to get to that point.

Bring that main point home with three sub points. One is respect for private property. Second, reverence for human life. And third, riches of God's grace. First, we see a general respect for private property here in this passage.

21.33 to 22.4 deal with farm animals. And then 22.5 to 6 deal with farms and fields. And they tell us what is to be done when damage is done to a neighbor's property.

Let's first look at what the Bible prescribes regarding the farm animals. And here the Bible clearly distinguishes. One, damage caused by accident. Two, damage caused by negligence.

And three, damage caused by malice. First category is damage caused on another's property by accident. We see an example of this in verse 35 of chapter 21.

[7 : 41] When one man's ox butts another's so that it dies. And they shall sell the live ox and share its price. And the dead beast also they shall share. So the owner of the ox that butted this other ox does not have full control over the ox.

And this particular ox does not have a history of goring other beasts. And so this owner is therefore not held responsible for the death of the other animal.

In cases of accidental damage to a neighbor's property like this, the two parties absorb the loss equally. The live ox is sold and any financial value gained from both the live ox and the dead ox are shared equally between the two.

And the leniency is due to the fact that the damage was caused by accident. And the second category is the damage caused by negligence. There are two examples given here of this in verses 33 to 34.

It says, When a man opens a pit or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner and the dead beast shall be his.

[8 : 52] This is a case of negligence. The man dug a pit and it's a big enough pit for that an ox can fall into it. And he could not have predicted that a neighbor's ox would fall into it, but he did know that there was a risk.

That's a pretty big hole on the ground and some ox could unwittingly fall into it. He was aware of the risk. He had knowledge to do something about it, and yet he chose not to do anything about it.

And because of that, it is considered negligence. He did not do what he could have done to prevent damage to someone else's property. And in that case, he needs to make restoration and pay for the price of the dead animal.

But since he has paid the price of the dead animal, he gets to keep the dead beast. And he can sell its hide or meat for whatever he wants. Now, maybe he cooks and eats it.

Imagine, maybe for a more modern example, a construction crew that is repaving a road, and there's a huge gaping hole on the road. And they neglected to put orange cones around it and signs around it to prevent cars from driving into it.

[10:03] And you don't know anything about it, and you drive your car straight into it, and then you blow out your tires and damage your car. Then that construction crew would be guilty of damaging your property by negligence. And they should have something to do with making restitution for you.

Now, verse 36 is another example of this. Or if it is known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not kept it in, he shall repay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his. So this ox, unlike the previous ox that we looked at, does have a history of goring. And so because, again, this owner now had knowledge, he was aware of the risk, and he could have done something about it, and he didn't.

It is considered negligence. It's not a simple accident. So that the damage that the ox does, that he must pay for it, and he gets to keep the dead ox, the dead beast, but he must repay the price.

Because he neglected to contain his own animal. Now, the scenario escalates starting in chapter 22, verse 20. It says, So, by the way, the Hebrew word for sheep here can refer to a sheep or a goat.

[11:20] And this verse establishes a general principle that sets the precedent, that they apply to all kinds of similar contexts. So this here is no longer damage done by accident.

It's not damage done by negligence. It's actually damage done by malice with evil intent. Because someone stole the ox or the sheep. And then they killed it and sold it, presumably to conceal their theft and get away with the crime.

In such a case, the punishment is far more severe. If the thief is caught, it says he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. So if you killed your neighbor's ox due to negligence, you just paid a full price for one ox.

But in this case, because you stole out of malice, you're supposed to pay five times the value of the ox. The severe punishment serves as a deterrent so that people don't steal.

But that's not the only reason why I think the punishment is so severe here. So if you think about it this way, the ox, because this is largely an agricultural pastoral society, is a productive resource.

[12:28] It produces value. It provides services. For example, in a farm. So when someone steals your ox, for that however many months it is that people are looking and trying to find this thief, the culprit, you're missing your ox and you're not able to get value from the work that it would have been doing for you on the farm.

So an ox can draw a plow and prepare the soil for sowing. An ox can go over the grain that had been harvested to thresh it, to separate the wheat from the husk, the grain from the husk.

They're a very useful animal and you don't get any of that. And consider also that you're not getting any milk during that time from the ox, which would have provided valuable nutrients, right? Protein and calcium for ancient people who didn't have multivitamins like we do from Costco.

And they could have also, after they're done using the ox for labor, they could have slaughtered the ox, sold a hide to make leather products with it, and eaten good beef.

And all of that is gone, right? You're missing all of that while the ox is missing. Sheep is similar, right? It's also a productive resource. It's not as productive as the ox because most of the time it just lounges around and grazes and eats your food in your field.

[13:44] But once it gets hairy enough, you could shear the wool and you could use it to sell and make things. And so it is a productive resource in that sense. And so because of that and because of the loss of value during that time, it's missing what the thief is being searched for.

I think there's a higher price here, a higher penalty. If your neighbor accidentally kills or negligently kills your ox, they could immediately pay you back and you could get an immediate replacement.

But when you're looking for a thief, that could take months.

That could take a long time, especially if they've tried to conceal what they've done by killing the ox or selling it. And so the punishment is more severe. And the difference between the sheep and the ox, the sheep is fourfold, the ox is fivefold, probably because of the relative value of the two animals.

Like I said, the ox is a much more productive animal. And so here, even here, we see the law of Talion that we talked about a couple weeks ago, the law of eye for eye principle at work.

The severity of the punishment must be proportional to the severity of the crime. And now contrast this with the Code of Hammurabi, a contemporary ancient Near Eastern law code that is often compared to the Book of the Covenant in Exodus.

[15:01] It says this, If anyone steals cattle or sheep or an ass or a pig or a goat, if they belong to a god or to the court, the thief shall pay thirtyfold therefore.

If they belong to a freed man of the king, he shall pay tenfold. If the thief has nothing with which to pay, he shall be put to death. This is a comparable law in a similar time.

And according to this law, if the ox is stolen from a temple official or from a government official, the thief has to pay thirtyfold, which does not quite seem proportional. If from a free citizen it is taken, you have to pay back tenfold.

And so it doesn't treat people as having equal value and worth as Scripture does. It gives them different value depending on their social status. And if the thief cannot repay, the thief is put to death.

And the Bible never treats stealing as a capital crime because human life is more important than property, which we're going to talk about in the next point. I'm going to skip most of verses two, three for now because it's a parenthetical remark about what to do when a thief is caught and killed in the middle of stealing.

[16:13] But I'll come back to that later. But at the end of verse three, it stipulates that the thief must repay everything. The thief shall surely pay. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

He's not given the death penalty. Instead, he becomes a debt slave. So he has to labor for six years until he pays off his debt and then he goes free according to these rules in the book of the covenant.

And then it says in verse four, if the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double. So this is different because the thief has stolen it, but instead of killing it and selling it to hide it, he has kept it alive.

And if the animal is found alive, the thief only pays double. In this case, it's being treated like a common theft because the other common theft of other goods, you only paid double because it's much easier to catch a thief who keeps the beast alive since the live beast can only go so far.

And it's not as bad as when the thief kills or sells the ox because you can recover your own animal. Now in verses five to six, we move on from damage done to farm animals to damage done to fields and harvest.

[17:27] It says in verse five, if a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over or lets his beast loose and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best in his own field and in his own vineyard.

So in this case, the intent is not perfectly clear. A man's beast has grazed from a neighbor's field. He's kind of stealing, his ox is stealing his neighbor's field, the food, the grains.

But did he know that his livestock was stealing from his neighbor's field or not? Right? It's impossible to say. And if they deny it, it's hard to prove it. But he certainly should have been more vigilant and he could have prevented his ox from grazing in a neighbor's field.

And so this case is similarly considered a damage by negligence. The owner of the beast must repay what his beast consumed from the best of his own field or vineyard, which is a wise additional detail because it would be unfair if the animal happened to be a very picky animal about the grain and he went over to his neighbor's field and grazed on all the premium barley.

And then the owner repaid him with very average barley. That wouldn't be fair. Right? So he's to give from the best of his crops. Verse six is similar.

[18:40] A fire breaks out and catches in thorns so that the stacked grain or the standing grain or the field is consumed. He who started the fire shall make full restitution. This is not an accidental fire from extreme heat and dry climate like it happens in California sometimes.

It says someone started the fire. But it's also not arson because it wasn't malicious. The fire got out of hand and caught in thorns nearby and then it spread to a neighbor's stacked grain or standing grain in the field.

So farmers sometimes do what they call slash and burn or prescribed burn. It's their way of intentionally putting remaining chaff from the harvest on the field on fire to burn it all off and prepare the soil for fresh sowing again in the new season.

It's one of the most economical way to do it although it's not popular nowadays. And so this is a case of damage caused by negligence again when the man must make full restitution because he could have done more to prevent the fire from spreading and damaging his neighbor's field but he didn't.

And so he must make full restitution. So we see a pattern emerging here. When there is an accident shared payment. When there's negligence full payment.

[20 : 02] If there's malice double payment. Unless the damaged property is a livestock or some kind of productive resource then you also have to account for the loss of productivity and livelihood.

So this is very practical and relevant if you think about it. What if you discover that you have been causing flooding damage to your downstairs neighbor's unit? Determine whether or not it's due to accident negligence or malice.

Was it an unclogged toilet or an overflowing bathtub? What if a tree in your yard was felled in a storm and it landed on your neighbor's car?

That's an accident. So you can share the loss and absorb the damage together. But what if you damage your neighbor's parked vehicle by ramming it with your car while you were driving and texting?

That's damage by negligence. Then you should pay in full for the damage done to the other person's car. But what if you hated your neighbor so much that you took an axe and you hacked your neighbor's vehicle into smithereens?

[21 : 17] Or you tried to steal his car. Well that's malice and you should pay double for the damage of the car. And what if that neighbor is an Uber driver?

So his car is actually his livelihood. It was a productive resource producing income for him. Well then you need to take account of all the lost income during that time when he couldn't work because of the damage you did to his car.

It's very practical. A lot of these things nowadays our insurance companies take care of it for us. We don't have to worry about it. But the principles of justice are here so that we can treat our neighbors fairly and love our neighbors as ourselves.

And so these are valuable lessons and the ultimate principle here is that we ought to love our neighbors and we love our neighbors in part by respecting their property, caring for their livelihood, and requiring fair and proportional restitution for property damage.

But what about more ambiguous cases where it's difficult to ascertain the truth or the intent? It says in verses 7 to 15 it addresses the topic of bailment and borrowing.

[22 : 27] A bailment is when you entrust your own personal property to someone not so that they could use it which is borrowing, not so that they could use it for a period of time for payment which is leasing, but just for safekeeping that's bailment.

You just keep it, can you keep this for me for a time? Don't do anything with it, you don't have to use it, just keep it for me for a limited time. That's bailment. Now, so if you are the one that's entrusting your property to someone else, you're the bailer and the person who receives it and takes possession of your property for a time for safekeeping is the bailee.

And this is different, as I said, from borrowing and leasing it. We're going to see all three of these cases out there addressed. First, Baal in verse 7 is straightforward. It says, if a man gives to his neighbor money or goods to keep safe and it is stolen from the man's house, then if the thief is found, he shall pay double.

So what if you were entrusted with safekeeping your friend's Stradivarius violin or an heirloom diamond jewelry or a Celtics hat, cap, signed by Jason Tatum?

Right? So you're, some valuable property that they were not willing to part with. They were like, everybody knows I have this in the house. Everybody knows in the neighborhood that I'm going to be gone for months. I am not leaving it in an empty house.

[23 : 49] Here, you're a friend of mine. I trust you. Can you hold on to this? Keep this in safe. Keep things in safe while I'm gone. But while your friend is gone, someone breaks into your house and steals the items.

What do you do? Well, I didn't steal it. You tell them you didn't steal it. But if the thief is found, you could breathe a sigh of relief because, well, the thief is found and that thief is responsible for double payment for what was stolen.

But what if the thief is never found? What if your friend starts suspecting something? Well, you seem to have a lot more cash than you used to.

You know? It says in verses eight to nine, if the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to God to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor's property.

For every breach of trust, whether it is for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a cloak, or for any kind of lost thing of which one says, this is it. The case of both parties shall come before God.

[24 : 57] The one whom God condemns shall pay double to his neighbor. And so if your friend comes to your house and sees something and says, hey, that's mine. You took that from me. And he's suspecting you, then you bring the case to God and you make a solemn oath and you wait for God's answer or you accept the oath if God does not give a clear answer or does not punish the person who took a false oath and you move on with that.

So you see an example of how this was applied in verse 11. It says, an oath by the Lord shall be between them both to see whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor's property. The owner shall accept the oath and he shall not make restitution.

So when there's lingering suspicion between you and your friend that is difficult to reconcile, you can go to God together and maybe you can go to a priest or a pastor to serve as a witness or a mediator that you can spend some time praying asking God to answer and you can take a solemn oath testifying, no, I did not steal your property, my friend and you ask God to reveal the truth and apart from sudden divine judgment or our hand clearly indicating that he is taking a false oath and he is lying, then you are to accept your friend's oath and require no restitution.

Verse 10 is a similar situation but this time with the livestock. It says, if a man gives to his neighbor a donkey or an ox or a sheep or any beast to keep safe and it dies or is injured or is driven away without anyone seeing it.

So livestock are known to stray from time to time so you have lost the livestock under your care but there is no negligence on your part. Well in that case then you can go before God again and take an oath and you don't have to pay restitution.

[26 : 40] It wasn't your fault. If you are watching your neighbor's cat and your neighbor usually lets the cat roam free in the backyard but this time around your cat actually ran away and never came back.

It would not be your responsibility if there was no negligence on your part. But it says in verse 12 if it is stolen from him he shall make restitution to its owner.

So if you are entrusted with someone else's livestock but that livestock was stolen while you were watching it then you are responsible by negligence because you didn't either properly lock the door lock the gates or you didn't put the ox in the barn at night like something happened so you assume some kind of negligence then you do need to pay restitution.

But if it is torn by beasts verse 13 let him bring it as evidence he shall not make restitution for what has been torn. It's a very possible scenario. A lot of people in our church have dogs and you guys let each other watch one another's dog sometimes when you're traveling.

Let's say that your friend leaves her dog with you in your care while she is traveling and then you take the dog with you to Nahant. Have you guys been to Nahant? Yeah. So Nahant is a small town north of Boston Massachusetts and I read an article last this month that there was a there's a dozen coyotes who are roaming Nahant and apparently over the last two years they've killed two dozen pets in Nahant and so they recently hired a sharpshooter a federal sharpshooter to come and kill some of these coyotes.

[28 : 16] So if you have small dogs don't take them to Nahant. Now so let's say imagine that you take your friend's dog while she is traveling away you go to Nahant then you go to the beach and you're having a good time and then you realize all of a sudden your dog is gone or your friend's dog is gone and then you to your dismay find the dog's carcass later.

A coyote devoured it. Well good news for you is you take the photo of the carcass and show your friend I didn't do it. It was a coyote it was not my fault and then you don't have to make restitution if it's torn by a wild animal.

It's funny but these are the kind of things that happen in real life right? Then lastly verses 14 to 15 you deal with borrowing and leasing. If a man borrows anything of his neighbor and his integer dies the owner not being with it he shall make full restitution.

If the owner was with it he shall not make restitution. If it was hired it came for its hiring fee. This is really insightful and helpful. Imagine your friend lets you borrow his portable speakers for a

backyard party you're hosting and it breaks while you're using it.

Then you should buy your friend a replacement portable speaker but if your friend who let you borrow the portable speaker happened to be with you at the party while you were using it and it breaks well then you actually don't have to buy him a new portable speaker.

[29 : 53] Why? Because the owner was there to watch to make sure that the item was not being misused or abused. He saw that you were not using the portable speaker as a drum against the rock.

He saw that you did not spill water on the portable speaker. He saw that you were just responsibly using the portable speaker and all of a sudden something went and it just stopped working. That's not your fault. Then you don't have to pay that back.

Now, so if your friend was with you, you don't have to pay but if your friend wasn't there with you then you should pay that back in full. That's the case of borrowing but leasing is a different scenario. If it was hired, it came for its hiring fee. If you paid your friend to lease his car for a period of time and you damaged that car while it's under lease, that was a risk that your friend assumed when he leased it to you and he should not make you pay for that repair.

It should have been factored into the leasing fee so you don't have to pay for the damage in that case. It's similar to how car rental companies make you pay for insurance when you rent out a car. But if you're just borrowing your car, your friend's car, and your friend's not with you and you wreck it, you should pay for it.

[31 : 04] Or at least someone's insurance will pay for it. All that to say the Bible teaches us to have a healthy respect for private property because it's an aspect of loving our neighbor.

If we love our neighbor, we will treat their properties with the care that they deserve. But as we'll see next week, because respect for private property is ultimately about loving our neighbor, the Bible doesn't want us to treat our own property as if it were some sacrosanct and inviolable thing that we must protect at all costs.

For example, later in verses 26 to 27, it says that if you have taken your poor neighbor's cloak and pledge, even if he had not repaid the debt, you should return the cloak to him because it says, return it to him before the sun goes down for that is his only covering and it is his cloak for his body. In what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear for I am compassionate. You are legally entitled to keep the man's cloak because he hasn't repaid your debt.

But it's the poor man's only covering in the chill of night. And so instead of insisting on your right and taking that and keeping that cloak as your own property, you should be compassionate because God is compassionate.

[32 : 25] While we need these property laws for the sake of justice out in society, remember that the ultimate goal for the Christian is not just justice for these things.

You're trying to love your neighbor as yourself. So we know that property rights, the protecting property rights is not the ultimate goal of this passage from its even higher reverence for human life. Last week we already covered the case where a goring ox kills a man or a woman, but we find more goring ox cases in our passage today. And why is that? Why didn't Moses just lump all the case laws dealing with goring oxes together?

He separated them because one deals with killing humans and the other one deals with damaging property and those two are very, very different things. And he intentionally classifies them separately.

According to 21-29, if the ox was accustomed to gore in the past and such a gore kills a man or woman, that ox was supposed to be put to death and the owner of the ox was guilty of murder.

[33 : 28] But in the case here in 21-36, the ox that has been accustomed to gore in the past, gore is another animal to death. In this case, the ox who gored the animal to death is not killed and the owner is not guilty of murder because human life is far more valuable than animal life.

Both have the breath of life in them, but only a human is created in the image of God. So this principle comes up again and again throughout the Exodus. We've seen it from Genesis 9.

And for your life blood, I will require a reckoning. From every beast, I will require it and from man.

From his fellow man, I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

Why? For God made man in his own image. That's why. That's the reason why human life has in esteemable value. Far greater than any property, no matter how rare or how expensive it is.

And we see this principle very clearly in 22 verses 2 to 3, which we skipped over earlier. So it says, if a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no blood guilt for him.

[34 : 42] But if the sun has risen on him, there shall be blood guilt for him. He shall surely die. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. So this is a parenthetical remark with a case of theft.

If a homicide occurs when a thief is in the middle of breaking in, someone kills the thief. Verse 2 specifically says that if a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no blood guilt for him.

Well, so that could be misinterpreted because we could think, well, then if someone's breaking into my house, then he's fair game. I can take him out and do whatever I want. I can kill him. That's without any consequence. That's not what this means because look at what it says right after that. But if the sun has risen on him, there shall be blood guilt for him. So verse 3 assumes that the thief in this hypothetical scenario was struck dead while breaking in at night.

If the thief was killed while breaking in at night, then the property owner is not liable for murder. But if the thief was killed while breaking in during the day, then the property owner is liable for murder.

[35 : 48] But why this distinction between nighttime and daytime? Well, it's because nighttime is when criminals with the most sinister intentions are active. And because it's difficult to discern the true objective of a thief in the middle of the night when you can't see him properly.

So Job 24, 13 to 14 notes that a thief in the night has particularly evil intentions. It says there are those who rebel against the light, who are not acquainted with its ways and do not stay in its paths. The murderer rises before it is light, that he may kill the poor and needy and in the night he is like a thief. This is why other ancient laws from different cultures also have reserved more severe punishment for nighttime thievery.

So at night, the owner of the house cannot see whether the thief is armed or not. So the owner doesn't know, wait, is this guy here to kill me, kill my wife, or kill my kids?

Or is he just here to steal? You can't really tell because you can't see anything. You don't know if he's armed or not. It is conceivable that in the confusion and chaos and surprise of the night, a frightened property owner who is unable to cry out for help because it's in the middle of night and the neighbors are asleep, he strikes the thief dead while defending himself or trying to stop the stealing.

[37 : 04] In this case, the property owner is given the benefit of the doubt and he's not charged with murder. Especially according to scriptural principles, you have to have at least two or three witnesses to convict someone of murder.

It also would be nearly impossible to convict this owner, even if you tried because there would be no witnesses. However, if he kills the thief during the day, then the law does not excuse him, protect him.

It holds him accountable for murder. Because why? During the day, you can observe the thief clearly. You can tell whether he is armed or not. If he's not armed, he's probably not here to kill you. He's probably just going to steal some stuff.

You could also tell during the day what the thief looks like. Maybe they're masked, maybe not. You could observe him carefully and try to track him down and find him later.

If during the day, you could also call to your neighbors for help because they're awake and they can see and you could have witnesses. So basically during the day, you have many recourses that can help you to avoid a fatal confrontation with the thief.

[38 : 08] But if you don't take those other recourses and you kill the thief during the day, then you are guilty of murder. This precedent shows very clearly that according to scripture's valuation, people, even if they are thieves and knaves, are more valuable than property.

Contrast this again with the code of Hammurabi, which stipulates that all thieves that break into a house should be put to death. Regardless of their intent, whether it happens in daytime or nighttime.

Other ancient Near Eastern laws do not consistently value human life over property. In fact, they often value property more than human life, especially if that property belongs to an upper class citizen.

But that's not the case in scripture. When you're in a crash with another car, is your first impulse and concern for the health and well-being of the passengers and the drivers?

Or is it for your damaged vehicle? When your kid drops and shatters your favorite teapot, is your concern primarily for the child?

[39 : 28] He's not cut. Or are you more upset about your shattered mug? In the New Testament, we see how radically Jesus' life, death, and resurrection transformed the way we relate to property.

Let me briefly share a few examples. In Luke 19, verse 8, when Zacchaeus, who was a wealthy tax collector, who was famous in town for stealing from his fellow Jews and defrauding them, when he encounters Jesus and is converted, he repents of his sin and he says, behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

According to Exodus 22, Zacchaeus was only required to pay double because he had defrauded and he had stolen common goods. But he voluntarily says, I will pay back fourfold, twice the required amount.

And he certainly did not have to pledge half of his goods to the poor, but he does. Why does he do that? Because he has found a far greater treasure in Jesus and his gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 6, 7, Paul is mediating between two Christian brothers. One has defrauded the other. The other one is now suing the other one to get his money back. And Paul says to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you.

[40 : 58] Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? It's getting back your money so important that you're willing to sue a Christian brother in front of an unbelieving judge.

What does that do for your Christian witness? It's getting your money and getting your rights, getting your property more important than the witness that you bear to your unbelievers around you. Paul's saying it is not. Because we now have an eternal perspective and we know that we have an imperishable inheritance in heaven, we do not live like money and things we own are the be all and the end all of life.

In Victor Hugo's classic novel, *Les Miserables*, John Valjean is a poor man who serves a 19-year prison sentence for stealing a single loaf of bread, which, by the way, would not be proportional punishment.

After he is released, he doesn't know how else to live and he steals valuable silver forks and spoons from a Christian bishop named Muriel who shows him hospitality.

[42 : 10] But while John Valjean is running away in the night, the way he's running away arises a suspicion of the police officers and they apprehend him and discover that he's carrying very suspiciously this silverware, valuable silverware, and assume that it's stolen.

And he says, no, no, no, I didn't steal it. This man gave it to me. And they drag him back to the bishop's house. They knock on the door and the bishop opens the door, sees the three police officers. Was it three?

I don't remember. And he sees the man and he sees John Valjean and he immediately remembers, he figures out what's going on. This is what he says. Oh, here you are. As if we're expecting John Valjean.

And he continues, I'm glad to see you. Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too, which are of silver like the rest.

And for which you can certainly get 200 francs. Why did you not carry them away with your forks and spoons? As the bishop's insistence that the silverware really is a gift to the man, the officers are dumbfounded and they depart.

[43 : 19] And John Valjean is stupefied. He can't believe what is happening. He's not going to be apprehended. He's not going to go back to prison. He's trembling all over. And before John Valjean leaves, Bishop Muriel takes a step forward to him, draws near and whispers in his ears.

Do not forget. Never forget that you have promised to use this money in becoming an honest man. John Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good.

It is your soul that I buy from you. I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition. And I give it to God. This is what Christ has done for us.

And so much more. According to 2 Corinthians 8, 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

We were all thieves. Why? Because as David acknowledges in 1 Chronicles 29, 14, after bringing an offering to God, all things come from you.

[44 : 32] And of your own we have given you. Everything we have is God's. Everything you see belongs to God. And we have lived like it's ours.

Instead of living like we are borrowers and stewards, using these resources that God's given us for God's glory, we have lived for ourselves and used them and spent them and stolen them for our own benefit.

We're all thieves. That's what we have done. But instead of arresting us and condemning us, he offers us the free gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ.

He promises as a heavenly inheritance through Jesus Christ. Bishop Muriel purchased John Valjean's earthly freedom with silver.

But Jesus purchased us for God and freed us from our slavery to sin with his own life. It says in 1 Peter 1, 8 to 9, we were ransomed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

[45 : 44] You could imagine Satan, our professional accuser, just going apoplectic over all this. He's a thief.

Thief. Thief. He does not deserve your heavenly inheritance. He does not deserve to be adopted as a child of God.

He does not deserve eternal life. The only thing he deserves is to rot and writhe in pain in hell.

But Jesus, our redeemer, replies, he's a thief no longer because I purchased him for God.

When I died on the cross for sin, I gave him my righteousness. I gave him the right to sonship. I gave him to be rich in heaven with all the inheritance out of the riches of God's grace.

[46 : 50] And it's because Jesus, who was rich, became poor. So by his poverty, we might become rich. That we can now have a transformed relationship with property.

That we can now live with sacrificial generosity toward our neighbors. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Yes, Father, it is true.

There is nothing good that we have that is our own. They have all been gifts from you.

Thank you. And the most precious gift you gave us, the gift of your own son.

We thank you for him. Thank you for securing our freedom through his life, death, and resurrection. Help us now as Christians to live in a manner that gives evidence of our heavenly inheritance, of our eternal perspective.

[48 : 13] May the way we safeguard our neighbor's property and love them, and the way we sacrificially give out of what you have given to us and entrusted to us.

May it bring glory to your name, Lord. And show the world how precious you are, and how precious is the gift of your only son, Jesus. It's in his name we pray.

Amen.