

Restoring What Is Lost

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Date: 05 March 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, art restoration is a fascinating discipline. And if you've never been exposed to art restoration, it's something that very well-trained experts do in taking these really old and messed up paintings and seemingly that have had irreversible loss and undoing what they've lost over the years and in the ravages of time and restoring these paintings very expertly with very specific tools back to what the artist originally intended for it to look like.

And they use now, today, they use technology, they use computers, they use also certain pigments and paints and physics, and it's amazing, as you can see behind me, an example of an artwork that seemed to be completely ruined and then it's being restored through the expertise and the specialized tools that these art restorers have.

Well, I want to suggest this morning that that is a very useful way to understand God's call to His church on earth.

We are called, if you boil it down, we are called, His people, His church, are called to be restorers of what is lost. Lost artworks, if you like.

In this world that is ravaged by sin, wherever sin has caused something to be lost or broken, God's people are there, and He has given them powerful tools to restore what is broken back to what its creator intended for it to be.

[1 : 47] Restorers of lost. That is a way you can understand the call to God's people throughout Scripture. And it is an idea that actually goes as far back as the law.

God's law to Israel. Now, the law that He gave to Israel all those years ago was the beginning of God training His people for the work that He had for them. And through the law, we've already started to see last week that He's training His people to think in a way that is different to the nations around them.

And so, the law He gives them for their nation to live in a society together which is going to do His work in the world is different in many ways to the laws of the nations around.

Now, there's a lot of similarities if you compare these laws to the laws of the Akkadians and the Babylonians and all the nations around them. But there was also some marked differences, principles, which are different in Israel's law to the rest of the laws.

So, last week, for example, we saw the principle, I hope you remember it, it's only been seven days, where the law of Israel had a special emphasis on the value of life.

[2 : 55] Do you remember that from last week? That the penalty against murder and assault was serious because life itself was valuable no matter whose life it was.

That's what we saw last week. And then, now, as we turn this week to the property laws, so the laws really are an expansion of the eighth commandment, do not steal.

These are all laws about property, not stealing, not damaging or destroying someone else's property. And as we read it carefully, there's another principle that stands out that is different to the other nations' law, and that is the importance of restoring what is lost.

And if you read these laws slowly, you'll see it comes up over and over again, restoring from loss. That's what I want us to think about this morning. What does that look like?

What does it mean? What does it mean for our lives? So, most nations in the ancient world had laws against theft. I mean, nobody likes someone else to come and take your stuff, right?

[3 : 57] So, every nation had laws against theft and against destroying someone else's property, as today, we've got laws against, you can't just go and you see something that you like that someone else has.

You can't just take it. You have to buy it or ask for it as a gift, right? Or earn it. And today, there's also penalties if you don't abide by that.

So, if you steal something, you could go to jail for a number of years. But in the law God gave to Israel, as we read this, these laws around property here, there's a preoccupation not just with punishment for someone who steals something, but with the importance of restoration.

It's not just about punishing the thief. It's about making sure that what was lost gets restored.

Because as you look through, look in your Bibles, as you look through, the property law section starts from chapter 21, 33, to chapter 22, 15.

And throughout that section, these property laws, there's a word that keeps coming up. So, look at verse 33 of chapter 21 to start. When a man uncovers a pit or digs a pit and does not cover it, or an ox or donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must give compensation.

[5 : 18] That word compensation. Then chapter 22, verse 1, a few verses later, when a man steals an ox or sheep and butchers it or sells it, he must repay. But that's the same, actually, root word.

He repay compensation. It's translated differently, possibly in your Bible, your translation, but it's there. Verse 5, when a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed in and allows his animal to go and graze someone else's field, he must repay.

That's the same word. Verse 6, when a fire gets out of control and spreads from thorn bushes, consumes stacks of grain, the one who started the fire must make full restitution.

Now, interesting, no matter how that word is translated in your English translation, whether it's compensation, payback, restitution, the fascinating thing is that it's the same word in the original Hebrew.

It's always the same word and it's a very interesting word. Now we're going to do a little bit of a Hebrew lesson. Are you ready? It's the Hebrew word salam. Salam.

[6 : 20] And it means much more than what these English words try to capture. It means much more than just paying back.

You may have heard it before. There's a very similar Arabic word in salam alaikum, you know, the Muslim greeting. And it's Arabic for peace, but it's Arabic and Hebrew are very closely related languages.

And this Hebrew word salam is related to the Hebrew word shalom. You've heard that before, haven't you? Shalom means peace. It's the way you greet an Israeli today.

You say shalom. It's a common greeting and it means peace upon you. And this word salam is related to that peace word. It means to bring to peace, to restore to completeness.

That's essentially what the word means, to restore something to completeness. And so, that word being used throughout these property laws in Exodus 22 means that the idea God wanted His people to get is that when sin caused any kind of loss, when someone's sin caused someone else to lose something, to lose out, whether it be time or money or opportunity, whenever that happened, the first priority for an Israelite was to restore salam.

[7 : 49] Even before you think about how can we punish this person so he doesn't do it again, the first priority was how can we bring this situation back to what it was before this took place?

How can we restore? How can we bring completeness again to restore salam? And, we'll notice in the law, it was whether you caused that loss by something you did, such as in verse 6 when you set a fire and it accidentally went over to a field and burned someone else's property, or whether it was by something you didn't do, something you failed to do, such as in 21, 33 to 34, when a man uncovers a pit or digs a pit and does not cover it up and an ox or donkey falls into it, he must give compensation.

So this is something he didn't do. He was negligent in making this hole that was actually going to be a risk for somebody else's property. And so whether it was something you did or something you didn't do, your responsibility was to see how you could restore salam, how you could restore this peace and completeness because of what was lost.

They had a duty to make restoration of whatever was lost. even to the point of, and I know this will shock our modern ears, becoming a slave of the person if you can't restore it.

So, we see that actually in, have a look at 22, verse 3, the end. A thief must make full restitution.

[9 : 19] If he is unable, he is to be sold because of his theft. Now, what that word means is he is to become the servant of the person that he caused the loss of so that he can eventually bring salam to him by working until such time as he's worked off his debt and then he can be set free.

We see that in other laws later that develop this. But the idea is restitution, this restoration, this salam was so important that you couldn't just put your hands up and go, I can't afford it.

And we think that becoming a slave of someone is, sounds, you know, harsh and barbaric. But actually, what we've got to do with Israel's law is always compare it to the laws around them at the time.

And if you stole and you couldn't pay back in a neighboring country, you would be killed. It would be death. But in Israelite law, death was never the penalty for property violation.

But you would have to somehow restore what was lost. And besides, when that happens, when a person's punished capitally for taking property of someone else's, that might punish them and it might get them out of the society, but it still doesn't cause restoration.

[10:32] The person who lost still doesn't get the thing back, do they? Yes, the thief is punished, but the person still has loss until such time as the advent of insurance companies and things like that.

That was the case. Even in today's world, though, it still happens. We call it justice today and even when it's working at its best, people who steal from you might be caught and punished, but there's still often no restoration.

You don't get your bicycle back often, right? They might end up in prison, but you've still suffered a loss. And that's actually, interestingly, why there's, in the last few decades, around the world, there's been an increased interest in what's called restorative justice.

Put up your hand if you know what restorative justice means. Okay, a few people do. Now, it's quite popular in correctional services to have this restorative justice.

And what it means is that the idea is that you don't just punish the offender for the crime they've done. you actually give them a chance to make restitution with the victim.

[11:47] And it's much harder than just throwing people in jail. But it's, and it takes, especially the victim, sometimes it's hard for them to meet, but sometimes they do. They meet with the person who's offended and relationship is restored to a certain extent.

And the offender is encouraged to find a way that they can pay back, that they can make restitution to the victim of the crime. And studies have shown that this way of doing correctional services is far more effective than the traditional way of just throwing people in prison and punishing them.

But it's been in the Bible all along. It's only become popular, this idea of restorative justice in our prisons, and Polsmoor is quite a leading prison in trying to do this. It's only become popular in the last few decades.

But it's been in the Bible for three and a half thousand years, this idea of restoration being even more important than punishment. Because that is God's design for how to address the loss of property that is inevitably going to happen in this broken world.

And He lays upon His people the priority of restoration whenever they've caused someone else to lose something in some way.

[13:05] That would be their first thought. He's training them. Whenever something you've done or haven't done has caused someone else loss, your first thought is how can I restore that loss? How can I make up for it?

And that is an important principle in our lives today as Christians as well, that we need to get into our brains. Because there is many ways we can cause loss in the life of someone else.

Many ways. Whether it's intentional by something we do or unintentional or by something we don't do. So, some examples. You go to spa.

You park in that really cramped parking at Prosper. You open your car door. Dunk! And you look and the car that's over there has been parked a little bit too close and you've opened your door a little bit too enthusiastically and you realize you've dented their car.

What do you do? Well, you know what your brain tells you to do? Dunk! Hmm? Park somewhere else. That's easy. It's easy to go and repark somewhere else, isn't it?

[14:09] What's difficult is to write a note with your phone number and put it in the person's windscreen wiper. What's difficult is to wait for them to come out of spa and say, sorry, I dinged your car.

How can I help to repair it? What is it going to cost? That's really difficult to do, let's be honest. The instinct, our instinct is to just avoid that situation but the principle of God's people is to always look for an opportunity to restore.

Well, let's say you've damaged something that you've borrowed. I wonder if you've ever done that. Borrowed a, boys and girls, a toy from your friends and you've damaged it and then you give it back

to them and hope they don't notice or you borrow a surfboard and then you wipe out in a big wave and you see there's a hairline crack in the board but it's really not noticeable so you could just give it back and not mention anything and maybe a few months later the person will think the crack is their fault.

So that's the instinctive thing to do but the right thing to do, what God's people do, people of restoration, is that they admit, listen, I think I broke this.

Is there any way I can help you to repair it? But that's hard, isn't it? To, when you know you've caused loss, to actually take the steps to help restore it.

[15 : 31] But that's the principle that is throughout God's law here when it comes to when you damage or cause loss for other people. But I think that principle applies beyond property as well.

We can take this principle and we can apply it to various areas of life to any way that we might cause loss in someone else's life. For example, loss of reputation by gossiping.

When you gossip about someone, when you slander them, you are causing them to lose reputation amongst the people you talk to. You're taking something away from them.

And so the principle applied to that, this principle applied to that situation, is not just to stop gossiping, which you should do anyway, because God hates that, when you slander someone behind their back.

It's not just to stop doing that. But it's to go the extra step of going, well, I've taken their reputation away. How can I undo that? How can I undo the damage that I've done?

[16 : 33] How can I now speak well about them? How can I build them up in the eyes of other people? You see, that's the idea here. It's finding what was the loss and finding a way that you can restore it, that you can bring salam back to that situation.

That's how God wants His people to think. That's how God wants us to think. That's what's going to actually cause us to stand out in the world. When you go to your friend and take his surfboard to him and say, listen, I think that crack there is because of something I did.

I know you can't notice it, but it's there. That's a big witness because that's not what people normally do, right? That itself is a way that we show we are different to the world and it's going to cost us.

Yes, it'll be costly to actually do that, to seek restoration, but it'll make us stand out. It's part of our witness. That's how God wants His people to think. How can I restore any loss that I've caused?

Because here's the thing. If you can't restore loss that you've caused, how on earth are you going to be able to restore loss that you haven't caused?

[17 : 42] Because that is our job as Christians on this earth, to restore loss that you didn't cause.

And if you don't know how to restore loss in someone's life that you have caused, how on earth are you going to be able to restore loss in someone's life that somebody else caused?

And that's the second thing because as we turn to the New Testament we see how this idea that's in its infancy in God's law is developed throughout the story of Scripture.

we realize this is actually the end goal of this law, to restore loss that you didn't cause. This restoring of loss that you have caused is just training, it's just basic training for the Israelites.

But this is where it ends up, this idea of restoring a loss that you didn't cause. Because, you know, most of the major problems with our world are rooted in the fact that everybody has lost something. Something. Everybody has lost something that hasn't been restored to them. This world is, we are surrounded by people who have lost something. You might not know what it is. It might be confidence, it might be a stable upbringing, it might be whatever it was.

[18 : 59] But everybody has suffered loss in this broken world that hasn't been restored to them and lots of problems today are rooted in that loss. So, fatherless homes, for example.

People, kids growing up who have lost a stable upbringing due to the sin of lust and adultery, which causes problems later in their life because of a loss they suffered as a child that was never restored to them.

People on the streets, many are there, you know, we turn a blind eye and we always assume, oh, well that person, they're there because of something that they did. But often, it's because of something that they've lost due to someone else's sin.

They lost confidence because of abuse, for example. Lots of people there don't know how to get a job, they don't even know how to start because they have no confidence in themselves because they were abused when they were smaller.

People are suicidal and are struggling with mental health issues because of trauma that has caused them to lose hope and lose joy. We are surrounded every day by people who have suffered loss that has not been restored to them.

[20 : 06] and the reason it's not been restored is because the person responsible for restoring that loss to them is out of the picture. And so they've suffered this loss and it's never been paid back.

And what that means is the only way for restoration to happen in those people's lives is if a third party is willing to step in and restore loss that they haven't caused.

Do you see how that works? So person A causes a loss to person B. Right? Person A does something, sins in some way that takes something away from person B.

Now the Old Testament law is that to get salam, to get peace and completeness, this person A needs to restore this thing. But what if they don't? What if they disappear? Then person B still suffers loss that hasn't been restored and it can't be restored.

The only way they can have salam and peace and restoration is if person C comes in and restores to them a loss that person C didn't cause. Do you see the principle?

[21 : 17] And this is an idea that is deeply taught within Jesus' own teaching. In fact, he teaches it specifically in the parable of the Good Samaritan that we read earlier.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 10 and let's have a look at this. Let's look at Jesus' take on this principle of restoring loss that you haven't caused. Luke chapter 10.

So, the story starts from verse 25 and in summary what's happening is that a lawyer comes to Jesus and he starts interrogating him about the law, what God's people are to do.

And then Jesus says, well, you know, the law is summed up in loving your neighbor. And the guy goes, ah, but who is my neighbor? And that was a constant debate amongst lawyers of Israel.

You know, who do they have the responsibility to look after and love and who don't they? And so, Jesus starts by answering, by giving him this parable.

[22 : 30] Pick it up from verse 30. Jesus took up the question and said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hand of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.

Okay, so this is a man who has suffered some serious loss, loss to his health, loss, loss, they obviously took everything from him, loss to whatever he was carrying.

So here's a man who is in serious trouble and has suffered serious loss. Let's see what happens next. Verse 31, a priest happened to be going down that road.

He saw him and he passed by on the other side. In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him passed by on the other side.

So these are very religious people. These are the people who were supposed to know the law more than anyone else, priests and Levites. Two very religious people saw him and they crossed the road and passed by on the other side.

[23 : 36] Because, technically, he's not their responsibility, right? They didn't cause that loss. So, why should they have to do anything about it?

That's the spirit. If you're going to keep to the letter of the law, the letter of the law says, restore loss that you have caused. And they go, well, I didn't cause that. So, conveniently passed by on the other side.

It's not my problem. And so, that's what they do here. They pass by.

And, while they keep the letter of the law, they don't keep the spirit of the law, do they? That's what Jesus is trying to say. He's trying to say, no, the spirit of the law is to love your neighbor. The spirit of the law, as we've seen a few weeks ago, all of the laws is summed up in love.

And so, what does that look like? Well, Jesus carries on and tells us about the third person, the Samaritan, verse 33. But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him and when he saw the man he had compassion, he went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine.

[24 : 41] Those were very expensive things, by the way. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, take care of him.

When I come back, I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend. Reimburse, that word means to restore.

This man was willing to restore a loss that he didn't cause. And he didn't come out, his plan that day wasn't to find this man, he was just on his business.

But instead of going about his business, he stopped, he changed his plans and he focused on restoring this man from loss. And it obviously cost him a lot to do that. And it's a loss that he didn't cause. Do you see how his attitude was in stark contrast to the attitude of the religious people who said, well, technically that's not my problem because I didn't cause it. And that's how Jesus takes these Old Testament laws in Exodus 22, these laws about restoration, and he takes them to the next level.

[25 : 56] Because Jesus tends to do that. He does not abolish the Old Testament law. He increases it, he emphasizes it, he intensifies it. the Sermon on the Mount is a classic example of that.

He takes a whole lot of Old Testament laws and he says, well, if you want to obey the spirit of this law, let me tell you what to do. We saw some of those before. And here he's doing the same thing about laws of restitution, laws of property.

He's intensifying and taking it to the real heart of what this law is about. But there's something else that Jesus is doing in the parable of the Good Samaritan. And that is that he is describing what he was preparing to do for each of us.

You know, because we think it's difficult to wait for someone to come out of spa so we can restore loss that we've caused.

How difficult do you think it would have been to give up everything to restore a loss of millions of people that you didn't cause? Right?

[27 : 01] That's what Jesus was preparing to do and he's describing that principle, this gospel principle in this parable because Jesus came, think about it, Jesus came from heaven to restore a loss that he didn't cause.

Right? A loss that you caused but you can't restore. Lost relationship with God, lost connection with eternal life.

Due to our sin, Jesus came as the good Samaritan even though he didn't have to and he paid the full price and over and above that for that loss so that we can be restored from a loss that we caused.

Isn't that amazing? just think about that. You all seem very subtle. You're looking at going, okay, this is amazing that you've caused a major loss that you can't recover from and it's going to kill you eternally and Jesus comes and he doesn't have to do it but he gives everything to restore you from the loss that you've suffered so you can be at peace and complete and in the way that your creator intended for you to be.

That is an incredible aspect of the gospel and these laws actually point us to what Jesus has done to restore us from loss. And so what he does is anybody who's actually grasped that about their own life and realized how much Jesus has bound up their wounds, how much he's come and he's gone the extra mile and he's paid the innkeeper and he's made all restitution over and above for us and he's taken our sins completely.

[28 : 45] When you get that and you really believe it which is what is the definition of a true Christian, you will be compelled to do the same in little ways in your life in response to what Christ has done for you to restore others from loss that you didn't cause.

Because Jesus calls his people to the same spirit in little ways and every day you will come across people who have suffered some kind of loss. And when you do, you're not just to pass by on the other side of the road and say, well that's not my problem, I didn't cause that.

But you're to think of how you might be able to be that third party who comes in to restore what someone else has taken. Because that is the best way actually of showing the reality of what Christ did for us.

Yes, we are to share the words of the gospel, but we're also to show the heart of the gospel to the people around us. That's the way we are to be witnesses of what Christ has done for us and one of the best ways of doing that is to look for opportunities that we might be able to restore someone's loss that we didn't cause.

That will stand out. That will magnify Christ. Christ. And that's also why when Paul, the apostle Paul, writes instructions for Christians later in the Bible, he actually writes a particular instruction to thieves who have become Christians in Ephesians 4.

[30 : 20] And he says this, and I want you to see what he says, because if it's Old Testament law, the law is, well, make restitution for what you've stolen. But he goes beyond that. Ephesians 4.28 says, let the thief no longer steal, instead he is to do honest work with his own hands so that he can

restore the losses that he's caused.

No, he goes beyond that and says so that he has something to share with anyone else in need. You see how Paul has taken this Old Testament principle and now taken it further?

So if you think about it, here's neutral, right? Here's a line, neutral, just picture it with me. You get someone stolen from you, then it goes into negative. The Old Testament law says the thief must restore that, bring it back to neutral, bring it back to salam.

But the New Testament law actually says, no, now make more money so that you can be generous, so that you can go over and above. That's the principle here. It goes beyond restitution to the opposite side of the spectrum to restitution, which is, well, to theft, which is generosity.

Restitution is the middle, bringing theft back to middle. Generosity is the true opposite of theft, because restoration is paying for the loss that you've caused, right?

[31 : 42] Generosity is paying for the loss someone else has caused. But why do we need to be generous? Because there are people out there who have suffered loss that hasn't been restored to them, and so they need our generosity in order to be restored.

That is being that third party. generosity is paying for the loss someone else has caused. And God's people are called to be generous.

If they truly believe the gospel, that's how they're going to show it to the world. Because we will come across all kinds of people who have experienced loss at the hands of others, and it's us who have been called and equipped to restore as much as we can.

just as an art restorer painstakingly restores a painting that suffered loss with specialized equipment that he has in his lab, we have been given special equipment as Christians to restore people.

Think about that. Just as an art restorer has this special skills and equipment and expertise to restore paintings, Christians have special skills and expertise to restore people from loss.

[32 : 52] The word, the Holy Spirit, and generosity that is inspired by the gospel. And so God will put people across your path who have suffered loss, but he wants to draw to himself, and when he does, the question you need to be asking yourself is, what can I do to restore this person, even in a little way?

And if you can't, if their loss is so great that you and your individual capacity cannot restore it, then the question is, how can I partner together with other Christians to restore those people from loss? That's why we do things like the Good Samaritan Project. That's why we have Dylan as our social action pastor, to give us opportunities to restore others from loss and to train us to be restorers of people and of the environment around us.

And so when we have opportunities to do things like Good Samaritan, to do things like community cleanup, don't just throw money at it, yes, throw money at it, but get stuck in because this is training.

This is training of how to be restorers because God's world is an artwork and the people he's made are beautiful, but they're broken and they've suffered loss. They're like those paintings that have been almost destroyed and we are the art restorers.

[34 : 06] They must go out there and train ourselves into how to restore with the equipment we've been given because that is how we're going to herald the coming restoration of this world because God has a plan to restore this world completely when Jesus comes back.

But as we act as little restorers on the way as we anticipate that in the situations God puts us in, then we point people to Christ who will ultimately restore them so that they can be part of that restored creation one day.

And so will we go out and be art restorers this week? Let's pray. Lord, we admit that we are sinners. We admit that we are broken and we have sinned and often caused the loss in other people's lives. And Lord, you expect at least that we look at how we can restore losses we've caused.

but Lord, we also realize that Jesus calls us to a higher calling than that. And that is to be the restorers of the brokenness around us even when we didn't cause it because that is what Jesus did for us.

[35 : 25] And so we pray, Lord, that you give us wisdom to know how to be restorers in the coming weeks and months so that we can point people to Christ and what he's done for us.

And we look forward to the day when this world will ultimately be restored and all loss will be undone. And Lord, help us to live in anticipation of that day in Jesus' name.

Amen.