

A Refuge For The Refugee - Leviticus 19:33-34

This morning we are continuing through a 3-week mini-series looking at specific intersections between Christ and our culture. This morning we will address the subject of refugees.

In 2016 the numbers of the displaced hit an all time high of 65 million men, women, and children, 22 million displaced across borders to become literal refugees. That means just under 10% of humans on planet earth are not living where they want to live, but have been forcibly displaced due to war, persecution, or other factors. Every minute 20 people are forced out of their homes, half of these are children. These numbers are going up, not down. What are we, as the church, going to do about it? Should we do engage?

My goal this morning is not to engage in politics, but to engage with the person of Jesus Christ and with His word. I desire to focus on how God's people should behave, not on how America should behave. The conversation about how the Scriptures work themselves out in the political landscape is a great conversation, but one for another time.

"How are we as Christ followers to view and treat refugees?"

Our primary text this morning is **Leviticus 19:33-34** "**When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.**"

Let's pray.

As we begin I'd like to frame our text in it's biblical context and within the mission of God. God creates man, man sins, is kicked out of the garden. After the tower of Babel the nations scatter all over the earth, but it's God's desire to go after them, redeem them, and bring them back home into His presence. How's He going to do that? He's going to do it through the nation of Israel. God claims them as His own and calls them to be His mediating presence to the world, they are called to be a light to the nations. How would they be a marvelous light, they would be holy. By how they lived they would declare who and what God is like to the nations around them, showcasing God's goodness and love and justice. The giving of the law fits within God's mission to bless not only Israel (the law is good), but to bless all nations.

When we get to our text in Leviticus 19, it's a high point of ethical development, how Israel should behave and how God will be manifested on the earth? "**When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.**"

Don't do him any wrong. Does God love the foreigner? Absolutely. He's been for the foreigner ever since the beginning. Okay, but how am I supposed to do that, give me some help.

He continues, "**You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you.**"

In other words, you should treat the foreigner like he isn't a foreigner. You should treat him like you treat other Israelites. You should welcome him in, not kick him out. You should give him the same value you give the rest of the Israelites. I think this must have been so radical for the Israelites. (This would be like asking the wolfpack, hey when you're tailgating and that tarheel fan walks by, welcome him in, offer him some wings). They are ethnically God's chosen people. They by nature see other ethnicities and nations as against God and as unclean, non-Yahweh worshipers. And here God says, let them in, and not only just let them in, but let them in and treat them as if they were your brothers and sisters. God wants them to come in and taste and see how good He is. Natives would come under Yahweh's Lordship and submit to the Law.

Then God gives the catch all, **“and you shall love him as yourself.”**

Love this foreigner as myself. You got to be kidding? i mean, I really love myself. Nope. not kidding.

Now we are not ethnic Israel, we are the church, and not every ethnic command carries over, like eating BBQ, praise God for that one! but loving others, that does carry over, no question. Jesus picks up the same language in **Matthew 22:36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”**

Paul picks up the same language in **Galatians 5:14, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Loving others as ourselves requires imagining that we are others. I know, we are getting really deep this morning. We have to actually put ourselves in their shoes. Then we ask, if I was this person, how would I like to be treated? The answer you come up with is the answer to how you should act toward that person. It's brilliant. Jesus is brilliant.

There's absolutely no conditions on it, but as sinners, we love to put conditions on it. We love to condition who merits our love, and we are careful who we give it to. Tim Keller addresses this issue, *“We instinctively tend to limit for whom we exert ourselves. We do it for people like us, and for people whom we like. Jesus will have none of that. By depicting a Samaritan helping a Jew, Jesus could not have found a more forceful way to say that anyone at all in need - regardless of race, politics, class, and religion - is your neighbor. Not everyone is your brother or sister in faith, but everyone is your neighbor, and you must love your neighbor.”*

Refugees are our neighbors. The question is, if you were a refugee, how would you like to be treated? The first thing we need to do is identify with them. This can be hard for most of us who have lived comparatively comfortable lives. We are far removed from their types of situations. The news reel almost feels fake.

World Relief, an incredible organization doing amazing work with refugees, has an exercise they use to help gain some traction for folks in this area. They have people write down 4 activities they enjoy, 4 people they love, 4 things you are thankful for other than people, and 4 roles that you play (like husband or mechanic). Let's just say you have a sheet of the most important things to you. They then explore 4 different types of losses, refugees experiencing 1 or all of them.

Persecution Loss where you mark an x on certain boxes if you have a disability, are poor, or have a certain political or religious view. If you are a christian, you lose a parent or a sibling.

Then they simulate **Selective Loss**, as if it was the middle of the night and you were woken up abruptly with that reality, where you have 10 seconds to mark off 4 boxes you'd leave,

How does it feel to have to make a quick decision about what you are willing to give up? Think of refugees fleeing their village and having to choose whether they take their Bible or their clothes or whether to run by the school to see if they can get their son, or just flee with the child sleeping next to them knowing that between here and the school they could both be killed along the way. Remember that they will have to live with this decision for the rest of their life.

Unknown Loss - you mark off people or items as lost, but you aren't sure, could be years until you find out.

Loss of Control - a facilitator comes by and randomly marks off things you lose. you have no control.

You've just been through tragic and traumatizing suffering loss, maybe lived in a refugee camp up in Virginia, before finally getting on a plane and landing in one of the only countries that will take you, Turkey. You are all alone. You don't know anyone, and you don't speak the language. You feel absolutely broken and helpless. How would you like to be treated? Now imagine refugee that's just landed and sitting on the runway at RDU. This isn't a simulation, it's real. How would you want to be loved? This is where it's okay to be selfish.

I'd love someone to welcome me and say hello to me. I'd love someone to take me out for a meal, I'd love someone to pick me up and take me to the Angus Barn. I'd love to have a friend. I'd love for someone to teach me how to speak English, or use a western toilet, or to set an alarm clock. I'd love someone to help me find a job.

Maybe it's even simply, I'd love someone to hug me and tell me everything is going to be okay. I'd love someone to tell me that God is sovereign and that God is loving. Somebody to pray with me and for me.

The refugee crisis is massive and complex, but stepping in and making a difference is more than possible. You don't have to travel to another country, refugees are in our own backyard.

World Relief Opportunities

- Good Neighbor Team (6 month basically adopt a family)
- Welcome Team (pick up from airport, drop off at apartment, eat dinner)
- Apartment Set-Up Team
- Friendship Partner (6-month every other week simply hanging out with someone)
- Organize Donations
- Welcome Kits

It would be cool to see some small groups get active in this way. Start where you can. If it's not welcoming an individual, start by helping set up their apartment, or simply putting together a welcome kit for them.

On a more organic level, I encourage you to open your eyes to those around you. You see someone from an ethnic background, don't make any assumptions about their story. You have no idea. Engage them, start by saying hello. You never know what God will do.

How should we treat the refugee, we should love them as ourselves.

If that is the how, what is the why? What is the backbone to the ethical question of why we should treat refugees this way?

First, God says, 19v.34, **because you were once refugees.** A severe famine comes over the land and Jacob and the family are forced down to Egypt. They are stuck down there and end up becoming slaves for four hundred years. God's saying, you know what it's like, you've been there yourself. You aren't any better than them. It happened to you. You can relate.

And then God adds, "**I am the Lord your God.**"

God referring to Himself in this way is pregnant with meaning. It's basically shorthand for "I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." I am God your Creator, Deliverer, and King. It's repeated over and over and over again through the giving of the law. Act this way because I am the God who created you, the God who saved you, and the God who reigns over and protects you. That pretty much gives God every right to command Israel to behave this way, and it gives the Israelites all the motivation to obey. I redeemed you from Egypt, because I determined of my own will to love you, not because you were anything special. There's tons of grace here. God gives the law after He saves His people. That's the way commands always work in the Bible, they follow relationship, they follow what God has already done, so the arise from

worship and gratitude, not out of fear or a hope to perform well enough to get in or stay in. In other words, God saves them, and then asks them to behave. It's like a father who adopts and post adoption asks the child to take on family resemblance, not before.

So He's in effect saying, because I have been so gracious to you, you should be gracious to others, you should love the refugee. To showcase my glory, and in gratitude for what I've done, love the refugee.

You might say, well we aren't Israel, so how does that work for the church? Great question. Because we weren't slaves in Egypt were we?

In the OT the playing field for God's activity was primarily physical, but in the NT it's primarily spiritual. Why does it shift? Physical Israel was to be the blessing. As they obeyed they would bless the nations. The problem was sin prevented them from being that nation. Israel, because of sin, would undergo another exile being taken over by the Assyrians and Babylonians, so something greater than Israel was needed. A divine answer was needed. God Himself would come in the person of Jesus Christ, to be that faithful Israelite to bless all the nations. Access into God's presence was not obtained by moving to Israel, but by believing in His Son. Those who place their faith in Jesus become spiritually the nation of Israel, true Israel, as Paul would put it.

So a massive shift takes place from the physical and political nation of Israel to the spiritual and global kingdom of the church. We are no longer concerned with political borders, we are concerned with people, period. We fight not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and forces of darkness. We might not have been exiled out of the promise land, but we have been exiled out of God's presence. We might not have ended up in Egypt, but we ended up enslaved to our sin. We weren't redeemed out of slavery in Egypt, we were redeemed out of slavery to sin. We weren't brought back to Israel, we were brought back to God's presence in Christ.

In this spiritual sense, every unbeliever is a refugee. They are foreigners, wanderers, enslaved to the enemy, and captive to their own sin. They are outside the home of God's presence for which they were created. And the only thing that can get them back home is Jesus through the message of the gospel.

(invitation- I'd like to pause here and ask you this morning if you are a foreigner to God's presence. If you have never come home, today is the day. It's exhausting not being in God's presence. Find rest and righteousness today. God's arms are open wide to you. He loves you. Come home to your Father in Heaven.)

Our first job is to bring spiritual refugees to that home. To the eternal home of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, in the New Heavens and the New Earth. 1 Peter calls all Christians, the church, sojourners and exiles. Our home is in heaven with Jesus. This is not our home.

Does that diminish loving on the actual physical refugee in our midst. Absolutely not. It propels us there. Why? Because we can relate to them on an even deeper level. And we desire to make God look glorious, to showcase His goodness and grace. What an opportunity to showcase God's nature to the refugee and to a watching world. As God was trying to show the world how great He was through Israel in the OT, so God is still trying to show how great He is through the church.

The world doesn't want these people. It's an opportunity to show that God loves outcasts. He loves throwaways. He loves the rejected and the homeless, the beat up and beat down, the helpless and hurting, the desperate and needy.

We love refugees not because we want them to see how great America is, but because we want them to see how great Jesus is. America is nice, but America will crumble. America can't forgive sin, it can't make someone righteous, it can't satisfy us at the deepest level, and it's not worthy of worship. Only Christ forgives, makes righteous, satisfies us, and is worthy of our worship.

We can love them as we love ourselves because we know what being a refugee is all about, in the deepest sense.

Dr. Timothy Tennent (missiologist Asbury) - 86% of immigrants are christians or will likely become christians. There is a huge opportunity to shine the gospel to these communities to them and to the watching world.

But it's not just declaring to the refugee or to the world how great God is, it's actual worship to Christ.

Matthew 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. **34** Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **35** For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? **38** And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? **39** And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

Loving the refugee is equivalent to loving Jesus. Jesus is sitting on a plane at RDU. Jesus is across the street in that apartment complex. Would you go to Him? Would you serve Him? Would you worship Him?

Our call as the church is great, and to fulfill our call we must operate in the strength that God supplies, looking to Jesus as the example and the Hero for us. Jesus left His home in heaven, in absolute glory and came to this earth, would experience living as a refugee fleeing into Egypt, lived a perfect life until He would face the ultimate exile of sin and judgement, not His sin, but ours. He was exiled in order that we might be brought home. Rising from the grave, He is our Creator, Deliverer, and King, who reigns high and lifted up, above all names. We as the church should not fear, for we have His Spirit, His power, and His authority to make much of His name by loving on refugees. Let us do that well as we look forward to the day we will gather with all nations, and you better believe with refugees, around His glorious throne.