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SIX LESSONS TO UNLOCKING THE TRUTH
TO GOD'S HOLY LAND



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews® 

RIGHTEOUS GIVING

Welcome to the third week of our six-week series about the modern state of Israel. Together we are looking at what the Scripture says about the Jewish people and their homeland, which is the modern state of Israel. This week we will discover a surprising connection between Israel as a nation and our calling as Christians to fulfill God's commands about both generosity and justice. That's why this message is entitled "Righteous Giving."

We are learning six teachings underlying God's covenantal relationships with Israel and her people, the Jews. In this sermon series, we will look at Israel from six different perspectives, including:

Israel is **Important**;

Israel is a **State**;

Israel teaches us about **Righteous giving**;

Israel teaches us about **Aliyah**—the Hebrew word that means return;

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we must become **Educated** (and educate others) about Israel;

Israel provides us for us an opportunity to **Love** our neighbours.

You might be surprised about the connection between generosity and justice, yet the Scripture makes a strong connection between the two. We not only give to support things like church budgets and missionary activity, we also give to support social justice here in our country and around the world.

The Old Testament has a particular name for this kind of giving: *Tzedakah*. It comes from two Hebrew words: "tzedek," meaning "justice", and "kah", which is one of the Old Testament words used for "God". One way to think of *Tzedakah* is to consider it as the biblical word for "Godly Giving" or "Righteous Giving". Giving to the poor and the needy isn't just an act of kindness, it is an act of justice and righteousness. It's not just for their benefit that God calls us to take care of the neediest among us, it benefits the whole community, and God will bless our faithfulness!

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is full of commands, advice, and examples of Righteous Giving. Let's look at a few.

Consider God's commands to His people. From the very beginning of the nation of Israel, God has always wanted His people to provide for the poor. For example, we read in Deuteronomy 15:7-10:

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need ... Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

God finishes His command with these words in verse 11: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land."

One of the great lessons from the Old Testament is that the people of Israel were themselves oppressed.

The Book of Exodus tells us they were slaves for 400 years in a foreign land. They understood poverty and injustice, and the connection between the two. That's why when God gave instructions to the people of Israel before they entered the Promised Land, He emphasized mercy and generosity toward the poor, and also toward the foreigner and the alien.

The Book of Leviticus is part of God's instructions to Israel for setting up a generous and just society. Leviticus tells us, "If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you." (Leviticus 25:35)

Second, the Proverbs are full of God's advice regarding how to live well. The Proverbs teach us that when we live in obedience, we live *well*. The Proverbs are filled with advice to show mercy to the poor.

We learn from Proverbs 19:17, “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.” This is sound advice from the Proverbs. Have you ever gone to the bank and asked them for a loan? The people at the bank will ask you, “What kind of collateral do you have to secure the loan?” In other words, how do we know that we can get our money back if you do not pay? Sometimes it seems that banks only lend money to people who really don’t need it! Now, imagine that *you* are the banker and that God is the person seeking the loan. Yes, that’s right. *You* have money to give and *God* is asking for loan! What Proverbs 19:17 is telling us is that when we give money to support the poor it is like we are lending money to God, who always pays His debts and who has all the collateral in the world—literally *all* the collateral in the world! What safer return is there than to lend money to the Lord?

Again, we see in Proverbs 22:9,

*The generous will themselves be blessed,
for they share their food with the poor.*

And in Proverbs 28:27:

*Those who give to the poor will lack nothing,
but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.*

Time and time again the Proverbs urge us to live wisely by caring for the poor. When a book of the Bible says something once, it’s important; when it repeats something three times, it’s vital! There are actually plenty more examples from the Wisdom Books of the Bible, but God’s care for the poor is also expressed in some of the most beautiful Bible stories.

For our third point, let’s consider the beautiful Old Testament story from the Book of Ruth. This treasured book tells the story of a poor foreigner (and a widow) who is received and welcomed into God’s community. It teaches us about one of the ancestors of King David, who is also an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it begins with two poor women, Naomi and Ruth, who needed the help of the people of Israel.

Perhaps you know the story. When she found herself widowed, rather than return to Moab, Ruth chose to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and to work to keep them both fed, even though they had no one to care for them. Because the people of Bethlehem followed God’s commands to leave a portion of their crops available for gleaning, Ruth was able to provide for her needs and her mother-in-law’s. (“Gleaning is one of God’s ways to remember the poor. You can read about it in Leviticus 19:9.) A wealthy man in the community, Boaz, saw how faithful, kind, and hard-working Ruth was. It touched his heart. In response to Ruth’s faithfulness in caring for her mother-in-law, Boaz went far beyond what was required by the biblical laws of the day to demonstrate kindness and generosity to Ruth. And here is a surprising connection: In this story, the person of Boaz represents the goodness and the kindness of God. The character of Boaz is a metaphor for God’s response to our faithfulness when we take care of the poorest of us.

Do you remember what Boaz did for Ruth? He told the men working in the field not to bother or harass Ruth. This meant that in addition to receiving food, Ruth also received protection. Furthermore, Boaz went beyond simply leaving the edges of his field for Ruth to glean. He instructed his workers to leave plenty of a harvest behind for her. Continuing this metaphor, this means that as we are faithful in our kindness (as Ruth was in her kindness to Naomi) that God will provide more and more resources for us to reward such kindness. It’s a wonderful picture!

So, we see from the Torah (God’s Law) and from the Proverbs (God’s wisdom) and from the Book of Ruth (God’s narrative) that God’s heart tilts towards the poor, and that God rewards those who show kindness and justice toward the poor. But what does this have to do with the theme of our series: The Nation of Israel?

The people of Israel are those who first received the Law, the wisdom, and the great narrative stories of God. We would not have our Old Testament were it not for the people of Israel. What better place to put God’s Word into practice than to look for the poor and the needy among God’s people, the people of Israel?

We have only looked at a small portion of what the Scripture has to say about God’s heart for the poor and the suffering. The great teaching across all the books of the Scripture is that God hates injustice and God loves the poor. As followers of Jesus, and as the people of God, we are called to align our hearts and actions with the things that God loves. This is why the third message in our series on the nation of Israel is entitled “Righteous Giving.” Of course, it is always a good thing to be a giving person. We should always be generous. We should support our local church, missions ministries, and charities whenever we have the means to do. Indeed, we should organize and prioritize our financial lives to make sure that we have the means to support our church and admissions and charities.

Since this sermon series is focused on the 70th anniversary of the modern nation of Israel, it is fitting and right to consider how we can practically support God’s people in Israel. There are at least three ways.

First, it is always good and right to pray for the people of Israel. Our prayers should lead us to search out agencies to demonstrate God’s love in practical ways to the people of Israel!

Second, we should be reminded that the modern nation of Israel is truly a nation of immigrants. Israel has welcomed to people from all over the world. Israel has opened its doors to both young and old alike, to rich and poor, and people of every ethnicity: Jewish people from every corner of the globe. These people come to Israel frequently with nothing more than the possessions they could carry in a bag.

Because of a host of political and socioeconomic issues, Israel suffers from the highest poverty rates among developed nations. The constant threat of terror and the growing elderly population puts stress on Israel’s social safety net, and there are people in need each and every day. One organization, the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews of Canada*, has an active ministry to those in need inside of Israel. *The Fellowship* is doing their part by funding programs like soup kitchens, children’s homes, medicines, and home care, just to name a few. They also help make these resources available to Israel’s neediest people, providing transportation, and meal delivery for the homebound.

This particular organization also demonstrates how Christians and Jews can work together for the good of the world. When Christians from our country and around the world help the people of Israel through the ministries of organizations like the IFCJ, we are demonstrating the love and commitment of Christians to the Jewish people. And remember, God Himself says He will bless those who bless Abraham and the children of Abraham. Just like the story of Ruth, God is eager to pour out His blessings on those who serve the people of God. If you are looking for a practical way to help Israel through a righteous gift, you should consider the work of *The Fellowship*. You can learn more about the work of the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews of Canada* on their website, www.ifcj.ca

Finally, it is worth noting that how Righteous Giving not only changes the lives of those who receive our generosity, it also changes our lives. Our generosity toward—and our participation with—the people of God reshapes our way of thinking and how we see the world. There are benefits to such generosity. We find ourselves becoming evermore aware of the needs of those around us. We also find ourselves awakening to issues of social justice that we might not have previously been aware of. How can we help the poor without believing in the cause of the poor? And the cause of the poor is dear to the heart of God. When we join with the work of God we find that we are becoming more obedient to the will of God. And in becoming more obedient to the will of God, we are being transformed into Christlikeness. This is an important benefit of Righteous Giving.