

THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE

A Devotional Meditation on Re'eh (See)

Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17; Isaiah 54:11-55:5;
John 4:13-14; Titus 2:9-10; Revelation 21:6-7, 22:17

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If the best things in life are free, why do we expend so much time and effort accumulating resources to buy the things that aren't free? We understand why luxuries are expensive, but why do basic necessities cost so much? Why is it we never seem to have anything left over after we buy food, pay rent, put gas in the car, and educate our children? Why is it that sometimes we don't even have enough to do all of that?

This is our modern reality. We are so caught up in the daily grind that we don't have time and energy to think of anything else. It's hard to contemplate questions on the meaning of life when we stress over how to feed our children. Where do we find hope?

There is hope in the afterlife, when Messiah Yeshua returns, the resurrection retrieves us from the grave, and we start fresh in eternity. But what about the time between then and now? How are we supposed to survive in this toxic global environment? Is there hope in *this* life?

God offers that kind of hope. He speaks of it in promises like this from Isaiah:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the water,
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost!
Why do you spend money for what is not bread?
Your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourself in abundance.

Isaiah 55:1-2 TLV

The echo of these words of God are in the words Yeshua spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria:

Yeshua replied to her, "Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty. The water that I give him will become a fountain of water within him, springing up to eternal life!"

John 4:13-14 TLV



Photo: Dr. Matthias Ripp, Lichteneiche, Bavaria, Germany, March 14, 2016.
Original photo available on Flickr at <https://flic.kr/p/Fr9McG>.

In his vision of the end of this age, John recorded yet more promises of Yeshua:

Then He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will freely give from the spring of the water of life. The one who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

Revelation 21:6-7 TLV

John also recorded the testimony of two additional witnesses to the reliability of this end-of-the-age promise:

The *Ruach* [Spirit] and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come—let the one who wishes freely take the water of life!

Revelation 22:17 TLV

That's encouraging, but it's still no answer for this present reality. We find it just as difficult as the Samaritan woman did to receive these promises as something now-and-not-yet: a spiritual truth that does not relieve our present daily distress. Like her, we are conditioned to say, "Sir . . . give me this water, so I won't get thirsty or have to come all the way here to draw water!" (John 4:15 TLV)

Before we dismiss the Samaritan's plea, let's consider whether we have over-spiritualized Yeshua's message to the point that we have missed some earthly realities. What are we to do about people in distress like this woman? It's commendable that we have soup kitchens, food banks, foster and adoptive ministries, medical missions, clothing drives, and charity construction projects, but what are we doing to address the conditions that create the need for such works? That's what the woman is really asking. It's the same thing we hear every day from the poor around us – poor by every meaning of the word.

The capitalist system we in the West have perpetuated did not create the deplorable conditions of the poor, but it has not been able to eradicate poverty. That's why Marxist critique has been so effective. Marx and his disciples down to this day can see the blindside of capitalism and identify the evils of the system. Marxist solutions, however, are abominable, whether they are spoken by Lenin, Mao, Castro, or American politicians. All the Marxists can do is advocate for a redistribution of wealth from one privileged elite to another. Since their advocacy comes from an ideology that denies the existence of a benevolent Deity, their solutions inherently resolve into totalitarian tyranny that seeks to take the place of God, and in the process takes the lion's share of resources, leaving the masses to fight over the scraps.

So where do we find hope for the here and now? The Torah just might have a prescription for healing this societal wound. Moses said quite a bit about economic and social matters. One provision concerned the seven-year economic reset called the Shemita:

At the end of every seven years you are to cancel debts. This is how you are to cancel debts: every creditor is to release what he has loaned to his neighbor. He must not force his neighbor or his brother to repay, for *Adonai's* debt cancellation has been proclaimed.

Deuteronomy 15:1-2 TLV

The Torah contains specific instructions on how to carry out this debt cancellation for God's Covenant people. It doesn't eliminate all poverty, but it does address the problem of greed that perpetuates and deepens poverty in a nation.

Israel was supposed to have carried out this economic reset as a way to ensure wealth would not be concentrated in a few hands, and everyone would have the opportunity to provide for their families. The community was to look out for one another so that indebtedness would be temporary. The debtor would still be obligated to work for a living, but while in debt, he or she would be working for a master or employer, doing just what Paul advised Yeshua's followers in similar circumstances:

Urge slaves to submit themselves to their own masters in all things, well-pleasing and not back-talking, not stealing but showing all good faithfulness, so that they may do credit to the teaching about God our Savior in everything.

Titus 2:9-10 TLV

Paul, the Jewish scholar, understood that the Roman Empire did not practice the Shemita, and that there was little chance debt relief would ever come from that rapacious system. Nevertheless, he advocated Torah principles to Yeshua's followers, both Jews and Gentiles, so that they could create societies that looked after one another and alleviated the grinding daily routine far better than anyone could do alone.

That may be the whole point of God's Torah instructions. The Torah won't be the law of the land, even in Israel, until Messiah reigns from Zion, but we can prepare ourselves for his reign right now. What God desires is a people who treat each other as brothers and sisters rather than as debtors and creditors. There will still be a price for nearly everything, but by paying the price together, we learn what the best things in life are, and why they truly are free.