

# With Liberty, Justice, and Empathy for All

There are basically two religions in the world: those who think you need to work your way into heaven and those who think all the work getting into heaven has already been done. Some might say then that Christianity is a lazy religion because all the work has been done. There are a lot of lazy Christians who think all the work has been done because they think Salvation is all there is. They work just hard enough to be saved, which is to say, not at all. Martin Luther King Jr. lamented that the church is more white than Christian.

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Jesus takes how we treat the poor very personally and I imagine he is very tired of being told to “pull himself up by his bootstraps.”

Matthew 26:11

For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

Deuteronomy 15:11

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

Matthew 25 is not a strange story preaching righteousness and salvation through works. It is a parable based on Isaiah 58. And Isaiah 58 is not a unique story either. We often find God's people lamenting that God isn't listening to them while they sit in sackcloth and ashes. As we go into the Lenten season and pick our thing to give up and the ashes to put on our head, it is important to remember what God considers a fast.

Isaiah 58:6-7

Is not this the fast that I have chosen?

to loose the bands of wickedness,

to undo the heavy burdens,

and to let the oppressed go free,

and that ye break every yoke?

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,

and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?

when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him;

and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Unsurprisingly, the fast that God has chosen mirrors Jesus' words in Matthew 25. In Amos 4 we find God tearing into his people who are oppressing the poor and crushing the needy. In Malachi 3 we find God tearing into his people who don't listen and have neglected the tithe which is used to care for the poor, the fatherless, widows, orphans, strangers in the land.

People expect miracles, God expects actions. We so often pray for relief for the poor and afflicted as we continue in our own business and concerns.

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination. - Proverbs 28:9

Time and time again, God tells us throughout the Bible that if we do not listen to Him and do what He asks of us, He will not be near to us.

Being a Christian is a lot of work.

Christ did the work of saving us. The work of not being self-centered is still on our plate. There are poor people outside the church. There are homeless people outside the church. There are hungry people outside the church.

Why are they outside the church?

The church is not a country club for middle class white people. A church should be more Christian than white. A church is supposed to be a sanctuary for the oppressed. A church is supposed to have a storehouse for the poor.

This Lenten season let us give up our sinful excuses to ignore those outside the church walls. Let us give up our sinful desire to hold onto every penny we earn. Lent is the time to build empathy for those who cannot choose their time, manner, duration of their suffering. This Lenten season, let's test God's promise:

Malachi 3:10

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Challenge every member of your church to set aside 10% of whatever their employers deposit into their bank account into a savings account or investment account from now until Thanksgiving. ACORNS is a very good option for this challenge so that the money can grow. The Sunday after Thanksgiving everyone reports to the church how much money is in the storehouse and then see what can't be done with the money to serve the community around the church. The money does not go directly to the church. 10% is a lot. Let the congregation hold onto the money but separate it from the money they spend. Let them be accountable to only themselves. Let them see how much God is blessing them as the year progresses. Let them see how their perspective changes as they learn they have more than enough.

Let them see how many diapers and how much formula could be bought for struggling mothers in the community. Let them see how many meals could be bought for the hungry. Let them learn what it means to not make excuses and come to the feast that Jesus has prepared.

Luke 14:16-24

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuses. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yokes of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Oppression starts at the top. Freedom, justice, and liberty start at the bottom. It starts by caring about the people outside your own door.

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