



BRAVE CHURCH

TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS
TOGETHER

Social Justice in the
Sermon on the Mount

Opening Prayer

Lord,

We again gather to discuss a difficult topic.

You have said that whenever we are gathered in your name,
you are among us.

Grant us Wisdom as we study and discuss

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

BC/HT Covenant



We will...

accept conflict and commit to the way of kindness.

take responsibility for how our words are received.

ask permission before we challenge someone's views on a subject.

show respect for one another and graciously receive feedback if someone feels disrespected.

use 'I' instead of 'you' statements. We will not accuse or attack.

give everyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so.

This is from the Brave Church book – how we'll interact in this class, but also ways we can interact with others in tough conversations.

Topics on Social Justice

February 8

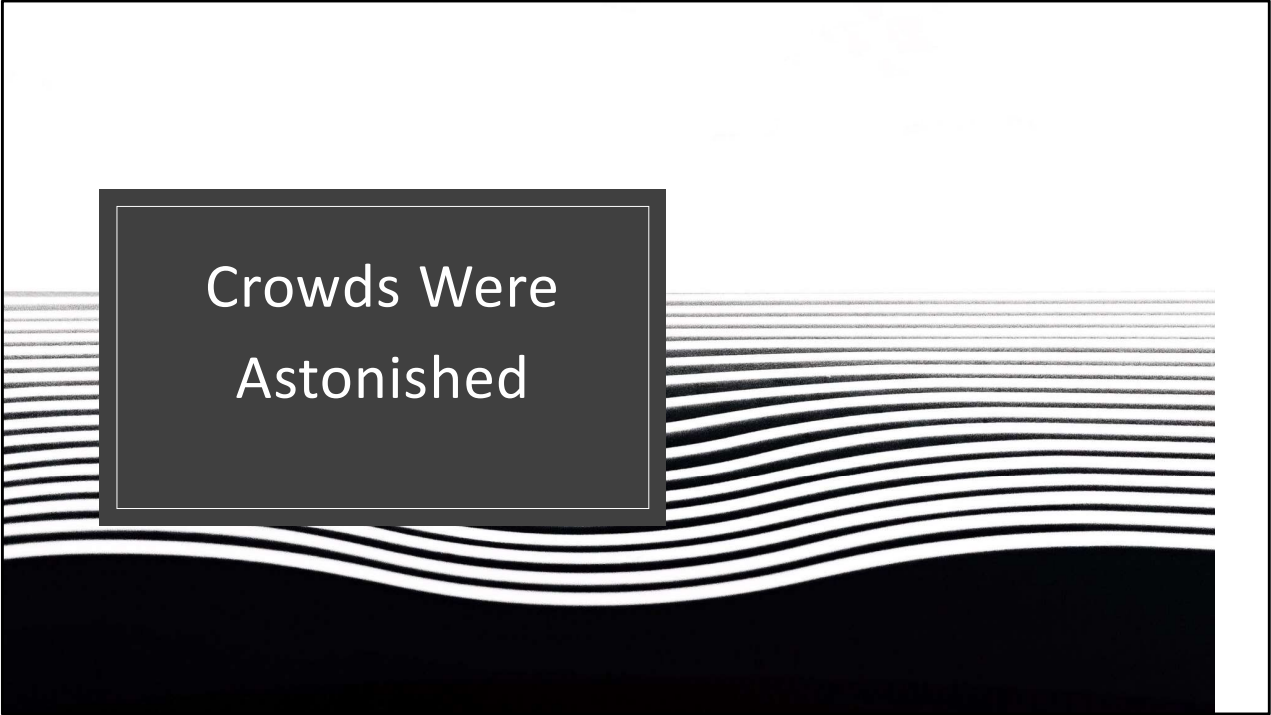
What is Social Justice?

Is Social Justice a Christian Heresy?

February 15

What does Jesus say about Justice?

Reflections from the Sermon on the Mount



Crowds Were Astonished

The Sermon on the Mount in Mathew Chapters 5,6,&7, is Jesus foundational text articulating God's Law and the themes of Social Justice. From a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus spoke to a large crowd.

The crowd listening near the Mount were Jewish and familiar with Old Testament teachings
The Beatitudes describe social situations in an unexpected way.
The connection to deeds of equity and morality are obvious

Is the crowd confused?

Do not think
I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets.
I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

◦ Mathew 5:17

Reading the crowd after articulating the 9 Beatitudes, Jesus explained His intent.

I did not come to destroy but to fulfill

Were they shocked with all the talk about good deeds and rewards for the Lowly?

Translation Bias

Do not think
I came to **Loosely Interpret**
the Law or the Prophets.
I did not come to **loosen them up** but to make them
replete, well stocked and ready for use.

Katalua(Gr)

Plero(Gr)

Mathew 5:17

A more literal translation is **Loosen down** rather than the usual abolish or destroy.

And The Greek word used for fulfill has many meanings

>>>>>

So the Jews in the crowd might have heard this Meaning rather than **abolish and finish**

Jewish Mindset

- Success, riches and honor
 - Blessings for one's piety and faithfulness.
- Poverty, disability, the downtrodden
 - spiritually bereft, sinners
 - unworthy of God's Blessing

During this time

Success, riches and honor were viewed as Blessings from God for one's piety and faithfulness.

Status was God's reward.

The Pious considered the poor, disabled and downtrodden spiritually bereft and therefore sinners.

Obviously God had chosen not to bless them

Why would someone give rewards to persons that God had chosen not to reward?

Torah promises
If
the People of Israel
remain Faithful
God would Bless them

IF>>>


Jews had a Precedent to Expect Blessings from God. The 5 Books of the Law & the Prophets related many times God bestowed a Blessing

But those blessings were mostly to the gathered Tribes **for the Nation as a whole.**

The Jews had come to see these promised Torah Blessings as conferred upon individuals

God intended that **Righteousness** (individual acts of **Equity**) within their **community** would elevate their Nation

The People of Israel were expected to Remain Faithfull to The Law and the Prophets

An abstract graphic design featuring a series of horizontal lines that transition from light gray to black, creating a wavy, undulating effect. A dark gray rectangular box is positioned in the upper left, containing the text "Supremely Blessed" in white. The bottom of the image is a solid black wavy shape.

Supremely
Blessed

Blessed are

- The poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Those who mourn, for they shall be comforted
- The meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- The merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- Are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- The peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God
- Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
 - for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

I am going to focus on first portion sometimes called the Beatitudes

The **Blessing**() come as an outcome of the **Action**—

Action initiated by God or one of His followers

So we can conclude that the

Blessings are not just pacifying hope for the future.

Rather The Beatitudes are a call for Christians and Jews to be **socially active**

P 34-39

Blessed are

- The **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Those who **mourn**, for they shall be comforted
- The **meek**, for they shall inherit the earth.
- Those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they shall be satisfied.
- The **merciful**, for they shall receive mercy.
- Are the **pure in heart**, for they shall see God.
- The **peace makers**, for they shall be called sons of God
- Blessed are those who have been **persecuted for the sake of righteousness**,
 - for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

There is a pattern in the first 7 of the 9 beatitudes
All describe people in general - theirs, they, those
The first set of 3 --- poor, mourn, and meek can be rephrased as the
materially poor, emotionally distraught, and acquiescently oppressed.
These states that make life very difficult.
Jesus promises a blessing to these people who suffer.

The second set of three--- THE merciful, pure of heart & peacemakers those
who are actively attending to the **needs of others**
So these **activists work** to address the needs of the first **suffering group**

AND some people----- **hunger and thirst for Righteousness** so much that
they are willing to be persecuted.

When either those in **need** or those who **serve** hunger & thirst enough,
change can occur
That is Social Action

Blessed are you

- When people insult **you** and persecute **you**, and falsely say all kinds .
 - of evil against **you** because of Me.
- Rejoice and be glad for **your** reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before **you**.
- **You** are the salt of the earth.....
- **You** are the light of the world...
 - Shine.....see your good works...to glorify Father in heaven

The 9th Beatitude is speaking to YOU- probably those in the crowd at the Mount who choose to be disciples of Jesus.

Jesus seems to be saying that His disciples **will be** persecuted. He declares these disciples to

Be the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World

Salt was expensive but highly valued . A little pinch greatly enhanced the flavor of food

likewise, the disciples will positively influence the communities where they work. Even a small number can make a difference

Light illuminates the darkness.

Good works should be visible but the Glory given to God



MOTIVATION

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Earlier I said. The Beatitudes are a call for Christians and Jews to be **socially active**.

The **motivation** for Action is clearly stated in the 4th Beatitude

Righteousness

Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for **righteousness**,
for they shall be satisfied.

Remember this Beatitude follows the 3 describing people in need
What do those desperately wanting Righteousness, want?
What does Righteous mean?

Righteous

- Traditional Christian Theological Usage
Justification—made right, acceptable to God
- Literal translation
Equity---quality of being fair or impartial in dealings with others
- *Dikaiosyne (Greek)*

Theologians today and beginning years after Jesus died use the Greek word for Righteousness to indicate Justification by Grace. **A spiritualize paradigm**

2000 yrs ago the crowd listening to Jesus speak understood word to mean **Equity**

Greek-good moral conduct, just, charitable

Hebrew—rectitude, justice, moral virtue

Aramaic (common, rural dialect) --beneficence—quality of doing good, performing acts of kindness or charity

So, Righteousness was active.

Equitable outreach to those around us—our neighbors

Contrast this to theological **Justification**-Jesus does it all-our works are have no merit

Discussion

Question

**“hunger and thirst
for EQUITY”**

**Does craving equity
motivate?**

**What happens to
poverty , sorrow and
oppression?**



PEOPLE IN NEED

Poor, Sorrowful & Oppressed

Equity cannot take place if there is no one to be equitable to.
The needy are needed If one's love for God is revealed through service to his neighbor

Melancholic Beggars

- Traditional Christian Theological Usage
 - Poor in SPIRIT---humble, destitute spiritually, dependent due to sin

Literal translation

- Poor—a beggar, a pauper, subsistence

- Ptochos(Gr)

Most folks in the Crowd are poor, hard-working people, striving to take care of their family and just survive.

The first thing Jesus says is the “Blessed are the Poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

They know what it is to struggle economically

But, both Matthew and Luke use a word that denotes severe poverty-one that implies the need to beg for subsistence. A person without any resources Spirit is used as an adjective so “in Poor Spirits” would be more literal --- Melancholic Beggars

Contrast to the Theological Use---Spiritually destitute

Sorrow

Those who mourn will be comforted

- Traditional Christian Theological Usage
 - genuine sorrow for sins, spiritual comfort from God
- Literal translation
 - Manifested Grief
- Pentheo(Gr)

Those who mourn will be comforted.

This mourning is a physical and emotional grief that is apparent to others.

Because the grief is visible, comfort can be given by sympathetic others,

What is mourned.? It could be anyone in pain.

Loss due to injustice or violence. Tragedy, Clinical depression etc.

Traditionally **interpreted** as sorrow for sin

Oppression

Meek shall inherit the earth!

- Literal translation
 - Mild, gentle, humble
 - Timid, submissive, passive
- Praus(Gr)

Those with a meek temperament may not assert themselves. There can be a loss of opportunity, position or income.

They can be shortchanged, exploited, even abused.

In our culture we do not expect much from the meek

Jesus offers the earth--**Equity**

Discussion

Question

Who are the people in need today?

What are the needs?

How can we respond?



PEOPLE WHO ATTEND TO OTHERS' NEEDS

merciful, pure of heart & peacemakers

Merciful

- Compassion
 - Action for someone who needs
 - A cost to the giver

◦ Eleemon (Gr)

Blessed are the merciful. For they shall obtain mercy

Mercy is **active**

The **compassionate** person sees the need of another and **actively** chooses to give.

The gift could be material, emotional, even judicial—but it has a cost to the giver.

The Needy could be poor, mournful or oppressed,, This act of **MERCY will Bless the Needy**

Pure in Heart

- Clean, washed
 - Changed heart, innocent
 - Clarify, purge

◦ Katharos(Gr)

The word Pure is literally clean or more specifically washed to make something clean or pure

This cleaning of the heart is active,---

With illusions to OT and acts of justice and charity

having distinct OT references

The phrase is also found in Psalm 73

The implication from Isaiah is that God will not resolve sin until the people acts of justice and charity

Peacemaker

- Resolution of some problem
- Implies interaction with people

Peacemaking involves Resolution of some problem and Implies interaction with people

This word is only used once in the Bible.

Righteousness and peace are linked in the OT so were familiar ideas for the Jewish crowd.

Working toward and achieving justice and equity in a society will obviously have peaceful benefits

Discussion Question

What does it mean to be a Peacemaker during a difficult conversation?



THE PERSECUTED

Persecuted

- Aggressively chase, drive away
- Harass, trouble
- Flee opposition

◦ *Diako (Greek)*

The 8th & 9 Beatitude both deal with the theme of persecution

The word means not just verbal abuse but a real threat to personal safety

Persecuted

- Blessed are those who have been **persecuted** for the sake of **righteousness**,
 - for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
- When people insult you and **persecute** you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of **Me**.
- Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they **persecuted** the prophets who were before you.

The reward is the kingdom of heaven-that implies that despite the difficulties, the opposition, the kingdom will be established.

To champion equity/righteousness is to work for **Socioeconomic change**. **Those** people, **good** people who have worked hard for justice will be Blessed with the kingdom of heaven

The 9th B is different, it speaks to **YOU**, to followers of Jesus---the Salt and the Light

Your motivation is not just **Socioeconomic change but religiopolitical**

Discussion

Question

**Who are persecuted
for the sake of Righteousness
today?**

**What about Christians in the
United States?**

Discussion

Question

**Is the kingdom of heaven
open to anyone who lives a
moral, honest, socially
equitable & charitable life ?
A good person?**

Resources

National Council of Churches of Christ. 2008. [Social Creed for the 21 st Century](#)

Todd-Peters , Rebecca. 2008, [To Do Justice, A Guide for Progressive Christians.](#)

Presbyterian Church (USA): Advisory Coucil on Social Witnessing

Resources

Bernstein, David. June 20, 2021. [Six Ways Critical Social Justice Undercuts Liberalism](#). Jewish Institute for Liberal Values

Closing Reflection

to **do** justice, to **love** kindness
And to **walk humbly** with you God

Micah 6:8

I would like to end this session again reflecting on the words of Micah. What does God want from us?

Let Us Pray together

Lord,

We are your family. One community.

I pray that we can all listen to and hear
our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“that all of them may be one.”

John17:21