

Acts 10:34-43  
Matthew 25:31-46  
April 4, 2010

### Easter Justice

Not too long ago I received an e-mail from a respected source asking me to turn myself in to the authorities. Just like you I get a lot of SPAM and junk mail, so I checked to make sure that the e-mail was legitimate and it was. At first I thought this is silly. I am not going to turn myself in. No one will know if I don't admit to my crime. This is just an e-mail. I closed the e-mail and moved on. This call to turn myself in though bothered me. After every e-mail answered, it kept popping into my head. Finally after a couple of days I agreed I needed a clear conscience; I decided to turn myself in.

I composed a reply and I sent it off. I admitted my offense. Through the Sojourners organization, which I financially support, I confessed that I was a Social Justice Christian. I sent an E-mail off to Glenn Beck who works for Fox News and I came clean.

I don't watch or listen to Glen Beck and I actually don't know a whole heck of a lot about him, but I was able to find out that Glenn Beck recently told his listeners to leave any church that teaches social justice, and to report its pastor to the authorities. Mr. Beck said that Social Justice

Christians like Presbyterians Lutherans, Mainline Protestants and Catholics were like Nazis and Communists. I am not sure which authority would prosecute me; but I did turn myself in to Mr. Beck. I am not sure I am at too much risk; but just in case my name ends up in the Baltimore Sun, the Annapolis Capital or the Washington Post; I wanted you to hear it from me first. For the record I abhor Nazis and Communists and can't see the connection to our church.

Dear Mr. Beck,

I'm a Christian who believes in the biblical call to social justice. I stand in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets and the teachings of Jesus that demonstrate God's will for justice in every aspect of our individual, social, and economic lives. I think your reading of scripture and your understanding of Jesus is rudimentary at best and I think your attacks upon "social justice" Christians are unwarranted and ridiculous. I hope you will reconsider your position. That was pretty close to the wording of the e-mail I sent.

One of the reasons I support the Sojourners organization is because it very often stands above the crazy left right debates that often define and in fact limit dialogue in our nation. The Director of Sojourners is an Evangelical Christian by the name of Jim Wallis who is respected by

conservatives, liberals independents and moderates. The guy is not perfect and like most national leaders has an ego; but he is thoughtful, engaging, civil and successful at getting people of different perspectives to the table for decent discussions about the Christian faith and its intersection with society. I don't expect liberals and conservatives, Jews, Muslims and Christians, republicans democrats and independents all to sit down anytime soon and declare the culture wars are over, let's sing kumbaya; but I do appreciate leaders who can help to get us all talking.

I thought that since Social Justice has been in the news and on the blogosphere it would be worth it to take a crack at trying to define the biblical vision of social justice. Social justice is a concept and dream that has its origin in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Torah, the first five books of the Bible instructs us to treat one another fairly both in commerce and in personal relationships. The Torah also enjoins us to go out of our way to take care of the widow the orphan and the alien, the least powerful among us and to pay the poor fairly and on time so they have money to buy food. At various times in the history of Israel, powerful people mistreated the poor and cheated them. The prophets of Israel delivered nasty stinging rebukes of such inequity. A lot of people think of prophets as people who predicted the future but mostly they were the conscience of Israel who prayerfully

dreamed about the special time in the future when the Messiah would come and all people would be treated fairly, enjoy health and have more than enough to eat and drink. Some of the prophets were so fierce in their condemnations of the wealthy and the powerful that they were arrested, beaten and imprisoned.

Jesus liked to quote the prophets and Jesus went even beyond the prophets in his proclamations. While it was common in first century to teach that the wealthy were blessed by God; Jesus taught that the poor also were blessed. While it was common in the first century to believe that the healthy were blessed; Jesus taught that God loved the lonely, the depressed, the physically challenged and those who were ill. He taught that disciples should be all about healing. Jesus expanded the biblical vision of social justice. His ministry was about reconciling people to God and reconciling people to one another. His ministry was about the forgiveness of sins.

While Jesus gave some serious smack to the wealthy in several sermons and stories; it is also clear that he had wealthy friends and that he had wealthy patrons who supported his ministry. I think it would be fair to assume that Jesus expected the wealthy to be generous and fair and the

very wealthy to be very generous and very fair. I suspect that for Jesus, giving began at the tithe and was not some theoretical or amorphous goal.

“While the term has sometimes been used to support ideologies of the left and right, social justice is in fact a personal commitment to serve the poor and to attack the conditions that lead to poverty. These are some of the most passionate beliefs of a younger generation of Christians and one of their most compelling attractions to Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Social Justice means working to dismantle structures that keep people poor.

What is kind of weird about Mr. Beck’s attack on Social Justice is the damage it does to Republicans and the Republican party. I polled a bunch of my Republican friends by e-mail this week and asked them to define Social Justice and all who responded, in one form or another affirmed the Biblical view of Social Justice as I have described it. Ronald Reagan and George W Bush were not afraid to use the term Social Justice they both advocated for Social Justice. George HW Bush was serious into 1000 points of light. These guys didn’t throw the phrase around like FDR, Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter but they had a vision for Social Justice.

I’ll give you this – shock jocks like Glenn Beck are entertainers that build their audience by saying things that get them attention. They push

---

<sup>1</sup> Jim Wallis in the Washington Post on March 27, 2010 page a13

the limits and simply by challenging Mr. Beck in a sermon to a certain extent I add to his fame; its just that you can't call my church Nazi and Commie and expect silence. That too would be irresponsible. We just raised thousands of dollars for One Great Hour of Sharing – that participation in establishing social is at the core of our identity as Christians who believe in Jesus, his kingdom and the concept of church mission.

This is the first Sunday after Easter Holy Humor Sunday or Joy and Laughter Sunday And I guess I chose this subject because Mr. Beck's "rantings" on this subject are laughable. Even leaders in his own religion,, Mr. Beck is a Mormon, have distanced themselves from his attack on Christians.

According to Matthew, just two days before his arrest and execution, Jesus was teaching people in the Temple in Jerusalem. Sometimes Jesus had a little shock jock in him. These words have always captured my attention. "For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you . Then he will answer them , "Truly I tell you, just as you

did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The next day they arrested him. This call for social justice was a large part what got Jesus killed.

I don't necessarily take these words literally; but I take them seriously. So should Mr. Beck.