

What If Jesus Was Serious...About Justice?

Week 3 ~ Chapters 14-19

Chapter 14 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then Justice Is Essential To Worship

This point is one of the main reasons why we're doing this series, *"Worship is not merely what God's people do in large religious gatherings. Some are surprised to discover that both the Old and New Testament deeply connect the act of worship to economic and communal justice...our pursuit of justice Monday through Saturday cannot be separated from what we do when we gather on Sunday...our commitment to justice may determine whether God accepts or rejects our praises and prayers."* (page 78)

- *When you think of "worship" what comes to mind? Also, what feelings are evoked?*
- *As you consider your faith, is it a compartmentalized, individualized, privatized aspect of your life or an integrated part of your life that orders everything else? (Explain)*
- *How does your/our vision and understanding of worship extend to every part of life and every person you/we encounter?*
- *How can we make sure we don't overlook/disregard those who God cares about...particularly the poor, needy, under-resourced, marginalized, oppressed, mistreated?*
- *Out of curiosity, have you been checking out the Scripture references at the end of each chapter? If so, what have you learned from them?*

Chapter 15 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then True Worship Lifts Up Christ By Lifting Up The Oppressed

"The question we should focus on to evaluate our worship is not whether we like the music or even whether the order of the service follows some biblical formula but whether our worship moves us to love and serve the oppressed. Does it inspire us toward compassion, mercy, and justice for the poor?" (page 83) While I understand and agree with what Skye is getting at here, I would personally advise against "evaluating" worship at all, as that has a tendency to center us, when the goal of worship is to center God. And, yes, the fruit of being centered on God will be an others-focused love. This is because, *"True worship...will shape us into the image of our God, who entered into the brokenness of the world to rescue, heal, and redeem."* (page 83) To say it another way, we become like what we worship.

- *Skye makes this assertion, "True worship means lifting up the name of Christ by lifting up the oppressed." (page 84) What do you think/feel about that?*

- *How do you/we evaluate worship? (Is that even the right question? Only God gets to “evaluate” worship.) So, perhaps, a different question...what is important/valued by God? Is God receiving that when you/we worship?*
- *How would you or, more importantly, how would God describe “false worship”?*
- *What are you/we becoming through our worship?*

Chapter 16 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then A Heart Far From God Lacks Mercy, Not Emotions

“Worship” is not a substitute for justice, nor is it an excuse to not be concerned about justice. Rather, justice (striving for it; participating in it) is one of the main ways HOW we worship. Additionally, our worship services/ceremonies/rituals/acts of religious piety are meaningless if we’re not concerned with weightier issues like justice, mercy, compassion.

Remember Micah 6:8, *“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* (emphasis added) The only way to fulfill this requirement is relationally—both individually/personally and communally.

- *Many, many...maybe most...people who read the Bible (at least on an initial, cursory level) make the observation that God, as described in the Old Testament, seems SO DIFFERENT from Jesus (God incarnate) that we read about in the New Testament.*
 - *Why do you think that is?*
 - *What’s been your experience with that?*
 - *How do you reconcile that?*
- *Prior to reading this chapter, how would you have answered the question “What does it mean to have a heart that is far from God?”*
- *What do you think about the idea that God might reject our worship? (see Isaiah 1:10-17, 58:1-14)*
- *What might it look like to practically live out Micah 6:8?*

Chapter 17 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then The Greatest Commands Are About Love, Not Labels

The point Skye is hammering home in this chapter and section is, *“Our devotion to God is inherently linked to pursuing justice for others.”* (page 90) Love for God and love of neighbor are inseparable. This is not new information for us. We know this. But do we LIVE it? In truth, we are all far more like the expert in the law who precipitated the parable of the Good Samaritan by asking, *“Who is my neighbor?”* (Luke 10:29) We all have some limit, some boundary to our love. (Whether we want to admit it or not is another question.)

- *Where is the limit of your love? That might be a challenging question to answer. To help get at it, we can also ask...*
 - *Who do I avoid?*
 - *Who do I find challenging, annoying, irritating...or detestable/deplorable?*
 - *Who do I NOT want to see blessed? (Or, who do I want to see get their just desserts?)*
 - *Who would Jesus use instead of a Samaritan if He were telling the Parable of the Good _____ specifically to you?*

The Parable of the Good Samaritan was/is meant to be scandalous. It is meant to confront its hearers/readers with what love actually looks like. By demonstrating that our limits to neighbor love are actually our limit/barrier to loving God, it is meant to offer us a sober look into our own souls and to show us that maybe we don't love God as much as we think we do.

Chapter 18 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then Justice Requires Both Compassion and Capacity

“The story [of the Good Samaritan] reveals that compassion, while an essential prerequisite for justice, isn’t enough by itself. Evil is overcome not just by our warm thoughts but by marshaling resources, coordinating care, and following through over time. These are all seen in the Samaritan’s actions. In other words, there is an economic component to justice that many Christian communities overlook.” (page 94)

The idea that “*you get what you deserve*” was a common thought in Jesus’ day and is a common (even if unacknowledged) thought today as well. Skye warns against this idea of “Christian karma”...because Jesus Himself challenges that notion. This chapter invites us to examine our attitude toward wealth and poverty. Is it as simple as reward and consequence? Additionally, what responsibilities come with wealth (especially in a world with such great need)?

As Skye puts it, “*As we are made aware of broken systems, inequality, poverty, and pain, many of us feel compassion. But feelings aren’t enough. The intent to care must be matched with the capacity to care. Are we, like the Samaritan, willing to sacrifice our resources and sustain our engagement over time to see wrongs made right? And do we see our wealth and resources as divine rewards merely for our own enjoyment or as equipment God has given us to extend His love and justice to others?*” (pages 95-96)

- *Do you believe the system (or the universe) functions on the premise that “you get what you deserve” (i.e. karma)? Explain. (Also, if you answered “yes”, how do you explain, or account for, grace and mercy?)*
- *How do you view your resources? Or, what’s the point/purpose of you having them?*

Chapter 19 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then Justice Is About Our Identity, Not The Other Person’s

We are all familiar with the Great Commandment—Love God & Love Others. A question that is often asked is, “Which others?” (or, “Who is my neighbor?”) I’m a big believer that if we ask the

wrong question, we'll always get the wrong answer. And that is the wrong question. The question implies or assumes there's a limit, a boundary, an exception. Friends, let me ask you this, who does God not love? Or, where is the limit/boundary/exception of God's love? And since we are to be/become like God, however we answer that question can be applied to us.

As Skye puts it, "...*the choice to love another should always be determined by our identity and not that of the person we encounter.*" (page 99, emphasis added) And what is our identity? We are Christians. We are Jesus-followers. We are those who are "in Christ". Our focus should be on living consistent to who we are, not determining if someone else is worthy/deserving of love, care, compassion, justice.

(Remember: love isn't a feeling, emotion, or sentiment; it is a decision/choice to do what is in the best interest of another.)

- *Where do you see people (and particularly Christians) placing limits, boundaries, restrictions, exceptions on who they will love? Or, where have you seen a preoccupation with boundary questions?*
- *Who are you willing to be a neighbor to? Who do you resist being a neighbor to?*

(Scroll down for Soul Training Exercise)

Soul Training Exercise ~ Make a New Acquaintance This Week

This week, undoubtedly, you and I will encounter various people...some of whom we know, many of whom we don't. For many of us, we will cross paths with other humans whose names we don't know...in fact, we know nothing about them other than they happen to be momentarily in proximity to us and whatever else we might be able to gather about them by observing them (if we even take the time to observe them).

In the spirit of increasing our capacity to love and overcoming any limits/restrictions to our love, the invitation this week is to make a new acquaintance. Learn the name of someone that you encounter this week. Perhaps engage in a conversation...even just small talk. Let's overcome the tendency and temptation to overlook/ignore the fellow image-bearers we encounter.

Some examples: the cashier at the store, the barista at the coffee shop, the other person waiting in line, the person at your place of employment you see everyday but don't know their name, the neighbor you've never introduced yourself to, etc.

I recognize this will take many of us out of our comfort zones. But no one ever said love was comfortable or easy.

Read & Reflect on... (these are the scriptural passages Skye has at the end of each chapter)

- Isaiah 1:10-17
- I John 4:19-21
- Isaiah 58:1-15
- James 2:14-24
- Isaiah 29:13-21
- Matthew 15:3-9
- Matthew 22:34-40
- Luke 10:25-37
- Matthew 19:16-30
- Matthew 7:15-20