



THE BOOKENDS OF JESUS' MINISTRY

LIBBY SWENSON



We must use time wisely and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right.

—Nelson Mandela

WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?

Jesus boldly declared His reason for coming and fully supplied us with all we need to continue His work. It is important for us to understand how He established His ministry and how He completed it in precisely the way He did.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

At times we may be confused about our purpose in life. By understanding Jesus' blueprint, we can repurpose our lives to fit into His plan.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Jesus gave us very clear directions regarding how to live and follow Him. When we understand His overall purpose for us, we can better understand how our lives can help transform a hurting world.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PASSAGE?

Luke 4:14-21: After his baptism by John, Jesus went

to the desert for forty days, where he was tempted by the devil. This passage picks up from there.

Jesus first returned to Galilee and then went to Nazareth (where He had been brought up) in order to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath to read. While there, He stood and read from the Old Testament passage, Isaiah 61:1-2. His purpose in reading this particular passage was to make clear who He was and why He had come. Jesus launched his ministry with this passage because He, standing before them, was the fulfillment of it.

Matthew 28:18-20: Jesus had already been crucified, buried, and risen again. He had been spending time with the disciples and told them to meet Him in Galilee (where He first began His ministry). It was at this time that Jesus gave them His final earthly address – to go and make disciples and teach them to observe everything that He had commanded them. All of His years of ministry with them had built up to this monumental moment. Jesus had paid the penalty of sin and had defeated death. They were left with the charge to revolutionize the world through Christ's command of the Great Commission.

LAUNCH QUESTIONS:

Think of a political campaign. Why is it important for the candidates to begin and end their speech well? What do they typically want people to remember?

Overall, what did Jesus want people to know about Himself? How did He live that out?

Did Jesus set a working model for college students? How?



EXPLORE QUESTIONS

Read Luke 4:14-21

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to read from Isaiah 61:1-2?
2. In what ways in Scripture do you read about Jesus:
 - a. Preaching good news to the poor
 - b. Proclaiming freedom for the prisoners
 - c. Recovering sight for the blind
 - d. Releasing the oppressed

3. How can you relate these physical attributes (poverty, blindness, etc.) to spiritual issues? For example, a person can be physically blind but also spiritually blind. What does that mean, and how can Christ - through you - help bring sight and freedom to others?

Read Matthew 28:18-20

4. What does it mean to be a disciple?
5. Since Jesus instructed us to obey all that He commanded, how is helping the poor correlated with making disciples?

APPLY QUESTIONS

6. Who today lives in the physical categories that Jesus described in Luke 4? Is there anyone you know and feel compelled to help? (People across the hall, across the street, or across the world.)
7. Jesus said that He came to proclaim freedom to prisoners and to set the oppressed free. What about those who are held captive by modern-day slavery and human trafficking? How do you think that Jesus came to release them? What is our role in that?
8. How can you explain to someone who does not know Christ why He came to preach good news to the poor?

GOING DEEPER

A. Read through the book of Matthew. In what instances do you see Jesus preaching the good news to the poor? How is He opening the eyes of the blind? What were the disciples and His followers doing while He was ministering to others?

B. Read John 9. Compare the physical blindness that Jesus healed with the blindness of the Pharisees. Do you think you have blinders on your eyes in any way? What about the blindness of others? What do you think keeps your friends, family, classmates, professors, etc. from seeing Jesus?

C. Write a speech on human trafficking and slavery and why it matters to you. Spend time preparing your introduction and conclusion to the speech. Remember, how you start and how you finish is an enormous part of what people will recall.

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised Him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth where He had been brought up[, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."



SERVING THE OPPRESSED

LIBBY SWENSON



God may well be with us in our mansions on the hill...He may well be with us as in all manner of controversial stuff... maybe, maybe not... But the one thing we can all agree... is that God is with the vulnerable and poor. God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house... God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives... God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war... God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them.

—Bono, The National Prayer Breakfast 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?

Jesus endured great oppression and suffering for the entire human race, offering every person salvation from their own sin and demise. As a result, God understands oppression and takes seriously the brutality that millions suffer today, and He will hold us accountable for how we respond to the vulnerable of our world today.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

As Christians, it is easy to overlook the oppressed, whether it is the person walking down the street or

the vulnerable child living thousands of miles away. We naturally feel badly for them but may perhaps find it too demanding to “get our hands dirty” for their sake.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Jesus' own oppression compels us to minister to the oppressed. We can respond to God by living a life of justice, mercy, and service on behalf of the vulnerable around us and throughout the world. Good works done in the name of Christ are pleasing to God (Colossians 3:17).

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PASSAGE?

Read Isaiah 53.

Jesus fulfilled this powerful Old Testament passage in several ways.

People expected that the Messiah would be wealthy, attractive, and politically powerful. But Jesus was none of these. He was born in a feeding trough to a family of low-economic status (his father was a carpenter), was from Galilee (a place of no renown), lived upon the offerings of others and even said that He had “no place to lay His head.” So, even though he inspired and attracted many people, He was rejected, despised and oppressed by even more. (v 2, 3)

He was oppressed and afflicted for the sins of the world. Just as a sheep is headed for slaughter, Jesus did not avoid His suffering; He was silent, and did not resist but willingly embraced it. (v 7)

“Oppressed” can be defined as “one who is subjected



to a harsh or cruel form of domination.” So when this passage states that Jesus was oppressed, it means that He, as God, subjected Himself to cruelty and domination. Why did He do this? The answer is found in Isaiah 53:11 – “After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.” Jesus became oppressed for us. His death on the cross made the payment for our sins so that we would not have to pay for them ourselves.

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

For many, this passage can be a bit confusing. Is God saying that if we don't help the poor and oppressed that we will spend eternity away from Him? Is it saying that we are saved by our works? When reading a passage, all things must be taken into context. Ephesians 2:8-9 states that we are not saved by works but by grace. But Ephesians 2:10 states that we are created for good works. So, we are saved by grace but saved for good deeds. And James 2 explains that our salvation and works are tied together. Our good works are a demonstration of the salvation that we have received. And if good works are not a part of our life, we should examine the validity of our relationship with God.

So in this context, we can better understand Matthew 25:31-45. In the dark places of hunger, prison, sickness, Christ said He was present. For those who did not help the poor, Christ is saying that they were so absorbed in themselves that they did not pay attention to the vulnerable and marginalized.

In *Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary* on this passage, he states, “He does not say, ‘I was sick, and you did not cure me; in prison, and you did not release me’ (perhaps that was more than they could do); but, ‘You visited me not, which you might have done.’ Note, Sinners will be condemned, at the great day, for the omission of that good which it was in the power of their hand to do.”

What is important to note in this passage is that those who relieved the suffering did it unto Christ. It was their love for Him that drove them to mercy and justice. It wasn't just to “do good.” It was all for Christ: their eyes were on Him and Him alone in serving the vulnerable.

As Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NYC states, “On Judgment Day, don't say

to the Lord, ‘When did we see you thirsty, naked, and captive?’ Because the answer is – on the cross! There we see how far God was willing to go to identify with the oppressed of the world. And He was doing it all for us! There Jesus, who deserved acquittal and freedom, got condemnation – so that we who deserve condemnation for our sins can receive acquittal. This was the ultimate instance of God's identification with the poor. He not only became one of the actually poor and marginalized, He stood in the place of all those of us in spiritual poverty and bankruptcy and paid our debt.” —*Generous Justice*, pg 188.

Christ is more among us than we think He is.

LAUNCH QUESTIONS:

How does serving the vulnerable apply to you as a college student?

Have you ever felt that “ministry” and “serving the least of these” are two separate issues? Why or why not?

EXPLORE QUESTIONS:

Read Isaiah 53, paying particular attention to vv. 7-8

1. Why did Jesus have to go through this type of suffering for the world? Why couldn't He have just said, “OK, everyone is forgiven, you're all fine now.”?
 2. How do you think Jesus understands the oppressed and enters into their suffering?
- Read Matthew 25:31-46
3. How does this passage state that Jesus will come? Compare His presence here to Isaiah 53. What is different?
 4. What are the saints/the sheep entitled to? How do they receive that?
 5. The passage makes no mention as to why people were hungry, thirsty, in prison, etc? Why do you think that is? How do you feel about that?

6. Compare the eternal destinies of the sheep and the goats. How seriously does God take this? What about people who do not acknowledge Christ but still do good works? How does this passage clarify where they fit into this? (For perspective, see Ephesians 2:8-10)



APPLY QUESTIONS

7. If Jesus was oppressed, then that implies that He had an oppressor. Who was it?
8. Read through Matthew 25:31-46 again, but this time insert, “I was in a brothel, I was enslaved in a brick kiln, I was trafficked, etc.” Discuss this as a group.
9. What role can you play in the lives of your friends who are doing good but not doing it for Christ? How can you help them to understand the deeper meaning of good works?
10. As a student, you may not be able to cure a sick person, but a doctor or nurse could; you may not be able to represent a poor person unjustly sent to prison, but an attorney could; you may not be able to construct water wells in a developing nation, but an engineer could, etc. Does this make you think differently about school? Why or why not?

GOING DEEPER

Injustice is often defined as someone using his or her power to harm someone with less power. Are there justice issues that you can address on your campus? As you think about specific justice issues, you may also want to think about more general ways you can use the power you have to serve others. Is there a tutoring program for special needs students? Any services offered for single mothers you can help with?

Look for ways to befriend people who don't look like you or don't come from the same cultural background as you. Ask them what they think about human slavery and injustice. What can you learn from them?

Learn about human trafficking around the world. What are the facts, statistics, and realities? Are there anti-trafficking organizations in your city or churches that care about slavery? How can they help you during your Justice Week?

Listen to Tim Keller's sermon, “Justice” at <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/justice>.

Isaiah 53:7-8

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth.

⁸By oppression and judgment He was taken away. And who can speak of His descendants? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was stricken.

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹When the Son of Man comes in all His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come you are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me.’

⁴¹Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me.’

⁴⁴They will also answer, ‘Lord when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’

⁴⁶Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.



TRUSTWORTHY STEWARDS

LIBBY SWENSON



I believe He wants us to love others so much that we go to extremes to help them. I believe He wants us to be known for giving ~ of our time, our money, and our abilities ~ and to start a movement of “giving” churches. In so doing, we can alleviate the suffering in the world and change the reputation of His bride in America.

—Francis Chan

WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?

Jesus confronted the hoarding of wealth in his culture by living out generosity toward the less fortunate. Alongside this, He gave a bold assertion that we are entrusted with – and will be held responsible for – what God has given to us.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We are living in a culture and society that could be labeled, “You deserve it.” You deserve a break, you deserve that nice car, you deserve a raise, you deserve to have it any way you want, etc. But Jesus never tells us that. What does it look like to live a culture that says, “Get more for yourself” when we should learn to give more for others?

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Since much has been given to us, much is required of us, and since much is entrusted to us, much will be demanded of us. By inviting the poor into our homes, we are being rightful stewards of what we have been given.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PASSAGE?

Luke 12:48b: “To whom much has been given, much is required.” Jesus made this statement in context of these parables:

- The rich fool who wanted to make bigger barns for himself. (Luke 12:16-21)
- The watchful servant who was prepared for his master to return. (Luke 12:35-47)

The man who built bigger barns built them for himself, to store up his own wealth and accolades, not to share or help others. But the manager who obeyed his master in managing his affairs did it because he highly revered what his master put in his charge. He was a faithful steward.

Think of it like a trust account. The more one has in the account, the more responsible he is for it. Or education; the more knowledge a person has, the more is expected of her. Or gifting and capacity; the more one has, the more useful he ought to be. So the expectations placed on a person are proportional to how much they are entrusted with.

Luke 14:12-14: Jesus was invited to eat at the home of a prominent Pharisee. On his way, He healed a man who had an abnormal swelling of his body, knowing that the Pharisees were watching Him. He then noticed at the meal that guests were seating



themselves in the most prominent places at the table. It is with this backdrop that He gives instructions for hosting a dinner. He told his host not to invite friends that would pay him in return for his generosity, but to instead invite those who could not pay him back.

LAUNCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do you equate stewardship with helping the poor?
2. In what ways are you particularly blessed by being afforded a college education?

EXPLORE QUESTIONS

Read Luke 12:13-21; 35-47

3. Compare and contrast the man who built bigger barns for himself with the manager who did what his master told him to?
4. Read the quote by Francis Chan. How do you connect this quote with Luke 12:48?
5. Read this verse in light of the United States. What implications are there for us as a country? How do we, as a nation, measure up? What difference can you make as a citizen through your life, your voting, your involvement in the community, and your choices?

Note: The USA remains the world's richest country, with more wealth than the combined treasures of the next four richest nations ~ Japan, China, Germany, and the UK. This includes not only economic output potential, but also mineral wealth and human capital. —“International Business Times”, July 3, 2012

Read Luke 14:12-14

Read the following book excerpt:

“The great eighteenth-century hymn-writer and ex-slave trader John Newton marveled at the far-reaching implications of these words. ‘One would think that Luke 14:12-14 was not considered part of God’s word, nor has any part of Jesus’ teaching been more neglected by His own people. I do not think it is unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.’” —*Generous Justice*, Keller, Pg 46

6. In light of this, what do you think it means to give preference to the poor?

7. Discuss what you think it might have been like for Jesus to make this bold statement while being a guest at a wealthy person’s home.

APPLY QUESTIONS

8. Make a list of all the things you have been given (think of things like education, freedom, family, personal belongings, etc). Compare that list with the two billion people in the world who live on less than \$2 a day. How can you shape your choices with them in mind?
9. A common element among the majority of people who are trafficked and sold into slavery is poverty. How can you use what has been given to you to help fight this horrible crime?
10. Deuteronomy 15:7-8 states, “If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.”
11. How can you practice this as a college student? What about after college? Note: “Currently, more than eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive.” —*The End of Poverty*, Jeffrey Sachs pg 1

Mother Theresa said, “At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.”

How can you be a good steward of the college degree you are working on? How can you avoid “building bigger barns” for yourself after school?

GOING DEEPER

1. Look through your checkbook or at your bank statement. Make line items of your expenses toward:
 - Entertainment (movies, eating out, coffee, social activities, etc.)
 - Giving to the needy



How do you fare? What percentage of your income is going toward helping to meet the needs of the less fortunate compared to your entertainment costs? What financial commitments for giving will you make this year? How can you continue this after college?

2. Along with your friends, invite students over who have physical or mental challenges. Make them a great meal, get to know them and learn their stories.

3. Listen to Tim Keller's sermon "Generosity in Scarcity" that can be found at <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/generosity-scarcity>.

Luke 12:48b – From everyone to whom much has been given much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Luke 14:12-14 – ¹²He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."