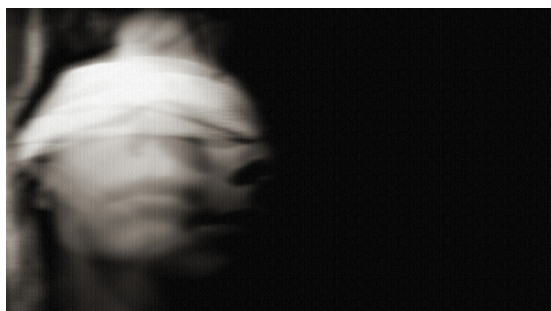




# SERVING THE OPPRESSED

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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](http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/justice)" at <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/justice>.

### Isaiah 53:7-8

<sup>7</sup>He 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.

<sup>8</sup>By 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

<sup>31</sup>When the Son of Man comes in all His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup>All 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. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

<sup>34</sup>Then 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. <sup>35</sup>For 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, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

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

<sup>40</sup>The 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.'

<sup>41</sup>Then 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. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I 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.'

<sup>44</sup>They 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?'

<sup>45</sup>He 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.'

<sup>46</sup>Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.