

Go! Missions

Session 3 – Heaven on Earth

Matthew 25:34-46



Introduction

In the early 20th Century, a new emphasis began to emerge in Christianity. It was responding to extreme poverty, rampant disease, exploitation of workers, and orphaned children born of the industrial revolution. The poor were drinking water downstream from where factories spewed chemicals. 12-hour shifts were common. Wages were minuscule, and there were far more workers than jobs, so unemployment was high on top of everything else.

As the church looked out its doors onto this disastrous situation, it heard Christ's call to care for the least and poor in its midst. This spawned the Social Gospel. This movement has taken on a life of its own, spreading into a host of social justice movements, and many emphases in the modern church.

The Social Gospel was a movement that sought to address the needs of the poor and exploited in the midst of the Industrial Revolution.

ASK - How have you heard the "Social Gospel" used? How would you define it?

The Social Gospel is an emphasis that the church should be making people's real-world living situations better. This would include feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, housing the homeless, and teaching the uneducated.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some current emphases of the social gospel in **YOUR** church? Be specific.
- Are there topics you think the church should be talking about more?

READ Matthew 25:34-46

Discussion Questions:

- According to this text, how are we supposed to care for the hungry, thirsty, naked and imprisoned?
- Does it seem like Jesus is too harsh when he describes how he will treat those not caring for the thirsty, naked, and imprisoned?
- Are there ways to care for the thirsty, naked, and imprisoned that make the situation worse? For example, should you give money to a homeless person if you are not sure about how they will spend that money (ie: alcohol and drugs)?

Preach the Gospel At All Times...:

There is a quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. It goes, "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words." This phrase is often mobilized to describe the social gospel. The most important thing we are to do is to feed, clothe, teach, etc. Passages like this one in Matthew could certainly be read to suggest the importance of this.

The assumed implication is that words are usually not necessary. **ASK:** What do you think?

Gather responses.

ASK: Should missions (both local and abroad) focus on evangelism (proclaiming the word of God) OR should it focus on the Social Gospel (meeting the needs of the poor and hungry)?

Gather responses.

Both. To prioritize one over the other is to miss the point. The Good News is that God "so loved the world." Because God loves his children, he does not want them to starve or be without shelter. Additionally, God's

love extends to our souls, and because of that, we are tasked to evangelize. If we have the world, but we don't know God, then we won't inherit eternal life. If we know God, but refuse to serve our neighbors in need, then I would argue we don't really know God and the extent of His love.

The complexity that arises for the church's mission is not a question of whether or not the church should be pursuing justice. We should. The social gospel is important. The issue is when the people of God assume they know what justice is without learning from God, first.

The issue is when **Social** gets disconnected from **Gospel**. Social justice is considered good in itself, without God teaching us what justice looks like. Social justice is a humanitarian effort. The social gospel, however, is not. It is seeking to do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven. God's justice may not look like what we want, it may not feel fair, but it is an expression of creating God's kingdom on earth. Proclaiming the word of God AND serving those in need is how we create God's kingdom on earth.

“Creating Heaven on Earth” Activity

Take a sheet of paper and on one side draw: Things on earth right now that will not be in heaven. (ie: violence, weeping, death, disease, sin, selfishness, famine, warfare, homelessness, hunger, etc.) Once you have drawn several things that will not be in heaven, take some time and write a short prayer over each drawing, inviting God's mercy into this world, now.

Example: A drawing of homelessness.

Creator of all life,

We long for the day when we will all worship you together in your house. We remember that many currently live without any home, and we ask that your mercy be upon them, and that your Spirit be in us to make us the hands and feet to serve our brothers and sisters who have no home. In Christ's name, Amen.

‘Going’ Forward

Talking about creating heaven on earth won't actually create heaven on earth. Actions must be taken. Our study's theme is to “GO!”

With that in mind, choose one thing from your list or someone else's and find a way to get involved in your community (you may already be involved in this area).

For example, I want to help tutor children who are disadvantaged and struggling in school.

After you have chosen one area you want to get involved in, write out two or three concrete action steps that you can take to move forward. Don't aim for the stars. Be realistic. If you are already involved, that's great. What does the next step look like for you?

For example, I will call _____ school and find out what they have in place for tutoring disadvantaged students. I will offer to volunteer 3/per month. OR, if you are already involved in a tutoring program, your next step might be to invite a friend to volunteer with you!

Conclusion

To preach the Gospel at all times is to both proclaim the good news that God is reconciling the world to Himself. AND, it is to serve those around us who are hungry, naked, and imprisoned. When we serve like Mathew 25 asks us to, we begin to see the kingdom of heaven come to earth. Part of our mission as Christians and part of being sent out (missional) is to care for the least in our midst. Christ came to serve the least, the last, and the lost, and Christ has sent us out with this mission, too.

PRAYER: Holy God, We pray that your kingdom come, and that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Send us out to serve the least, the last, and the lost, as we all work together to create your vision of heaven, here and now. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.