

JUST MERCY FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Isaiah 58:6-11



Just Mercy Series

BEFORE THE LESSON

The cross of Christ is the ultimate expression of both the justice and the mercy of God. Jesus suffered so that the true cost of our sin could be atoned for, and in Jesus, God offered himself in the person of his own Son in order to pay the price of that very atonement. In one act – Christ’s death on the cross – we see the full expression and embodiment of God’s unfailing commitment to both justice and mercy in the way he governs all of creation.

But apart from the cross – throughout the entire Old Testament, in the broad sweep of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and following both the cross and the resurrection, we see the unfailing commitment of the Triune God to these same fundamental commitments – justice and mercy. The experience of many of the Patriarchs as refugees and sojourners; the experience of the Jewish people as slaves in Egypt; the 40 years that Israel wandered in the wilderness after leaving Egypt; the deep commitment of the Mosaic Law not only to purity and personal holiness, but to the just treatment of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan; the unambiguous preference in the earthly ministry of Jesus for those who “need a physician,” and for the “least, the last, and the lost;” and the historic commitment of the Church to remember and care for those the world has forgotten – all of these things bear witness to the intertwining of both justice and mercy in the economy of God. Justice speaks to and influences the way that God sows mercy into the world, and mercy does the same as regards the way God sows justice into the world. Justice and mercy are the best of friends in the economy of God, and because this is so, they must be the best of friends in the way his people work out his purposes in the world.

In this sermon series, entitled “Just Mercy,” we will touch on this intertwining of justice and mercy by looking into four practical contexts in our own communities where, if we are to walk in the way of Jesus, we must embrace the way of “just mercy.” The first of these regards the way we engage with immigrants and refugees in the world, the second with the tragedy of sex trafficking both worldwide and in our own communities, the third with God’s special love for those with special needs, and the fourth with

the heart of God for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. Our prayer is that as you and your group engage with God through his word and his Spirit in this series, he will transform you in heart, mind, and action in the way you engage with the “least, the last, and the lost,” and increasingly lead you in the ways of “just mercy” in every sphere of life.

This week we will begin this series by focusing on “Just Mercy for Immigrants and Refugees.”

STARTING THE LESSON

One of the most consuming, controversial, and heartbreaking issues in both the United States and around the world today concerns the unprecedented mass migration of people fleeing war, natural disaster, violent crime, genocide, religious and political persecution, unemployment, and lack of opportunity, and seeking refuge from those challenges in another country, or another part of their own country. Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Honduras, and Venezuela are but a few of the epicenters of mass migration, and the news in recent years is full of stories not only about migrants themselves, but of the reactions of political leaders and citizens in the nations where they are seeking refuge. In the midst of both mass migration and the reactions to it, it is easy to miss the fact that the Bible actually speaks a lot about how we are to treat immigrants and refugees, and the purpose of this study is simply to look at a few texts that clue us into God’s heart for what he calls in Isaiah 58 “the poor wanderer.”

TIPS FOR LEADERS

As a leader, part of your job is to help the people in your group squarely face those aspects of God's call that make them uncomfortable, and even angry. To model a settled, peaceful approach, and to avoid anxiety as your group discusses even controversial subjects, is the mark of your growing maturity as a leader.

STARTER QUESTIONS

Share an experience in your life when you felt like an outsider. Perhaps it was during a move to a new city, or when you were traveling, or perhaps you yourself were or are a refugee or immigrant to the U.S., or you found yourself invited to a party where you didn't really know anyone, or where most of the people there were very different from yourself, or perhaps you have lived or are presently living as a minority in a much larger majority culture.

How did you feel in the midst of that experience? Was there anything that anyone did to you or for you during that time that made it easier or harder for you? If so, what? What was your experience, if any, of God in the midst of that situation?

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, thank you for bringing us together tonight. We can see pain and suffering in our neighborhoods, our city, our country and in all parts of the world. We come to you and ask you in particular to give us a deeper awareness of those who are the "sojourners" among us, to expand our hearts to love them as you do, and to lead us into practical works of love for their sake. We invite you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to join us tonight and ask you to bless our study, discussion and our time together. We pray these things in your name, Jesus. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE

Isaiah 58:6-11 (NIV)

⁶ Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

¹¹ The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

First, ask a couple of your group members to take turns reading a portion of the text to the left, Isaiah 58:6-11.

Isaiah rebukes the Jewish people for missing the point in their legalistic keeping of the fast as regards food and drink, and goes on to define the fast that God actually wants from his people. How would you describe the fast that God calls for in verses 6 and 7?

- *To work against oppression, and to care for the hungry, the poor, and the wanderer.*

What do you make of Isaiah's statement regarding the Jewish people's "own flesh and blood?" Why would you say that all people are "from our own flesh and blood?"

- We learn from Paul's sermon in Acts 17 that God made all the nations of the earth from one man, Adam.
- We see all the nations of the earth brought under the reign of Christ in the book of Revelation.
- Consider what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatians 6: 9-10:
⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

He (the Lord) defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹ And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Exodus 22:21

Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

Psalms 146:9

The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

What are some possible applications of “loosing the chains of injustice,” “breaking every yoke,” and “setting the oppressed free” as it pertains to immigrants and refugees?

- *Many possible answers, including personal service, working to change the system, advocating for displaced persons, etc.*

In verses 8-11, what does God promise to those who pay attention to the poor, the needy and the “poor wanderer?”

- *Their “light will break out,” “healing will appear,” their righteousness will precede them and the glory of God will follow them, God will answer them when they call, God will satisfy their needs, and guide them, and strengthen them, etc.*

As you reflect on the benefits of caring for the poor and the wanderer, how does it make you feel? How does it change your level of motivation and commitment to caring for immigrants and refugees, if it does?

- *Many possible answers...*

What do you think are some of the primary influences on people's thinking about immigration?

(Allow your group members time to respond)

- *Media*
- *Friends and family*
- *Immigrants that people know personally*
- *Immigrants they don't know but have observed*
- *Elected officials/political party*
- *The Bible*
- *Religious leaders*
- *Etc.*

Lifeway Research, the research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, surveyed 1,000 Evangelical Christians and found that the highest percentage, 17%, were influenced by immigrants they have interacted with. 16% cited friends and family, tied with the media. The Bible was the fourth most cited influencer at just 12%!

Have three members of your group read Deuteronomy 10:18-19, Exodus 22:21, and Psalm 146:9.

What do these passages say about how God viewed immigrants in relation to the nation of Israel?

- *He loved them*
- *He watched over them.*
- *He defends them.*

How did God want the Israelites to view foreigners who settled in their land?

- *He wanted them to love immigrants, as well as their own countrymen.*
- *He expected them to treat immigrants justly and not mistreat or oppress them.*

In what ways does this apply to immigrants in the United States today, and to how the church is to view immigration?

(Leave time for discussion)

- *They are deeply relevant to the situation surrounding immigration in the U.S. today, and should deeply inform our response to the immigrants in our communities. These texts are reveal God's character, which does not change.*

So, what would God have us do for immigrants, or for others in our midst who are displaced by natural disaster, war, economic hardship, violence, political or religious persecution, etc.?

- *Look for ways to meet immediate needs. We can send food, clothing and money for disaster relief.*
- *By financially supporting the church, we support ministries that help immigrants, like the legal aid service offered to those with immigration issues through the Community Center and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes offered at the community center. Volunteer to help in the ESL program.*
- *Seek to get a better understanding of the issues of migration in our day.*
- *Let our Congressional representatives know we want them to take action on immigration reform.*
- *Apply the guiding principle Jesus gives for all human relationships: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Why do you think God reminds both the nation of Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ, that we were once foreigners?

- *So we can remember what it was like to be the stranger in a strange land and be more empathetic towards immigrants.*
- *So we will remember that this is not our home, we are sojourners as long as we are on earth and will be until we go home to heaven.*
- *To engage our imaginations as we grow in empathy to "fellow pilgrims" on the earth.*

PRAYER

MINISTRY

Option 1

Break into smaller groups of two or three. Share your reactions to today's discussion and reflection on immigrants and refugees. Pray for one another and ask God to speak to your concerns and/or fears and to let you know what he would have you do to be a part of his solution. (To facilitate this, you might consider committing to 40 days of scripture and prayer using the guide available at evangelicalimmigrationtable.com, under the Biblical Resources tab.)

Option 2

Discuss as a group what you might do to better understand someone who immigrated to the U.S., or interact with someone who does not have resident status, but would like to move permanently to the US. (The ESL ministry may be one way. Consider contacting International Friendships, Inc. (IFI), a community organization that works in partnership with universities and Christian volunteers in Central Ohio to promote friendship and hospitality for international students, scholars, and their families.)

