

# The Jesus Revolution is a long way from finished (v.2)

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Text: Matthew 25:31-46

*While many of the world's ills can be placed at Jesus' feet, and commonly are within secular culture, that's only because we haven't finished enacting his revolution for human morality.*

The theme of the lectionary readings this morning is the reign of God. I'm deeply troubled by that theme. You see, we are 2000 years into one version of that theme and it's not a pleasant one. That's the version of the theme cooked up by Western Christianity and spread across the planet. It's a theme that puts wealthy, white, males at the top of the colonial pinnacle and pushes the most powerful system of global imperialism and ecological destruction ever developed.

Our planet is in a death march led by the people of Jesus, particularly those most committed to a conservative vision of Jesus. Those who honour Jesus most with their words, actions, and pocketbooks, are those who lead us all to the end of the world, a world of ecological exhaustion, a stinking desert surrounding a whitewashed stack of empty commercial containers.

And for this I blame Jesus. The mess we see flows in large measure from the teachings of Jesus 2000 years ago. While Jesus is not completely at fault, there is no question Jesus gave us a set of moral rules that are deeply embedded in this terrible global mess.

However, I don't think the solution is to backtrack from Jesus, or temper Jesus with the findings of science, or try to syncretize Jesus with other views. I think the solution to the mess is more Jesus. This mess is no doubt in part due to the teachings of Jesus, but I think if we keep following out the meaning of what Jesus taught we will find that his moral revolution is just beginning and the only hope the world has is to take Jesus further. We need more Jesus, not less, even if Jesus is part of the problem.

I'll start with the case against Jesus. It's well-trod intellectual ground and my intent is only to summarize briefly the conclusions of some pretty significant intellectual work.

First, his message does not respect human differences. It breaks the natural human bonds that tie people to kin, land, and nation. His teachings tear apart the fundamental

things that bring people healing and hope and the grounds for cooperation to solve problems.

Second, his message offers an otherworldly solution. As resurrected Lord he represents denial of the fundamental reality of human suffering in this world and the need to focus on the local community for well-being and the essence of life. Instead he offers a way out of this cosmos, a vision of transcendence where even death is not ultimate.

Third, his message encourages superstitious beliefs that a transcendent God is the source of meaning and value in life, not connections to land or community, or participation in a family.

Last, his message suggests that meaning is individual in orientation, rather than collective, and that each human being is ultimately precious.

It is a horrific message and its outcomes are quite logically:

- Capitalism—through respect for individual property and economic rights, and a commitment to individual moral choice.
- Economic exploitation of the planet through a sense of life as gift in the context of transcendent love and compassion, where the planet is one of those gifts.
- Ecological destruction through the infinite distancing of human moral worth from the conditions of the planet.
- The destruction of ties of community and family through an emphasis on moral identity found through commitment to God.

The scripture text this morning is a perfect example. It's a core teaching of Jesus about God's role in human existence. In it Jesus makes the stark moral claims that logically lead the world to its current mess. Let me read:

*25:31-32a "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory and all the nations will be gathered before him.*

You see how we start off with an appeal to a transcendent vision of a superhero God. It's a moral universe in keeping with Marvel Comic's Thor, not a logical analysis of current conditions. It continues:

*25:32b-34 He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;*

We move to a catastrophic judgement of humanity as a whole by this super-God, one using animal analogies. Then look at the standards of justice applied:

*25:35-36 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'*

Which leads to the conclusion:

*25:40 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'*

Need I elaborate? Here is an appeal to justice on the basis of the experiential conditions of those at the bottom of the human collective social hierarchy. Further, these outcasts and human refuse are defined as central to the divine family, violating all the fundamental human norms of family life and communal identity. It's a complete inversion of all the things that motivate and guide human moral excellence. He has rendered the pure impure, the legitimate illegitimate, the authoritative inconsequential, the traditions baseless, and the powerful irrelevant. Traditional markers of meaning are thrown overboard and all established points of identity and value are erased.

John Rawls couldn't have done a better job outlining the fundamental and imperialist conditions of the liberal-democratic welfare state. Except Jesus does it by appeal to God and thus he is spared the need to write Rawls' massive volume.

Just as effectively as any apologist for late-capitalism or liberal-democracy, Jesus has proclaimed with his ethical cry, the divorce of human beings from the conventional and some think essential ties to life, family, hierarchies of value, and appreciation for place.

As critics have noted, it is an implicit call for systems of justice, human rights, and moral commitments that encompass the whole planet. It's a call for a United Nations, the nanny state, and global free trade practices.

And it has not the slightest regard for the existence of local community, family ties, or sound ecological practices.

That's a ridiculously brief summary of the destructiveness of Jesus' teachings and I could go on. But I merely want to show that Jesus is responsible for much of the mess we are in as a planet.

To solve this current human mess, the perceived call for human survival and planetary restoration, is the rebuilding of local community, commitments to small-scale agriculture, the celebration of markers of ethno-cultural identity and difference, and the restoration of the traditional systems of family and social life. The cries are wide-spread, from back-to-the-land Christians, to the vote for Catalan independence, even to the calls, if Doug Todd is to be believed, for the protection of white culture as a component of global multiculturalism. Local autonomy, it is said, breeds social responsibility. Small scale, it is believed, leads to ecological awareness. Barter will end economic injustice. Strong communal identity will eliminate violence, especially suicide and drug abuse. Instead of Jesus' call for universal human dignity and global unity in service of the outcast before God, these critics of Jesus' moral universalism focus on the small-scale and local, perhaps even trying to get off the globalism and free trade grid, in order to get us to our true salvation.

But I don't think so. The historical and anthropological record for those imagined answers to the Jesus problems are not good.

- Hunting to extinction was a way of life for early humans.
- Desertification through agricultural over-production has been true of small scale farming no less than agri-business.
- Honour killings, inter-family, clan, and tribal violence as well as infanticide are the human norm in the absence of state justice.
- Small scale ownership of agricultural land is the root of the oppression of women.
- Ignorance, superstition and poisonous gossip thrive in local communities of identity.
- Calls for communal identity are at the root of social exclusion.

Conversely, the Jesus revolution has been responsible for:

- The spread of universal human education.
- The decline of violence at every level of human existence.
- The extension of human life expectancy.
- The flourishing of the arts.
- The development of science and technology.

- Respect for women and children.
- Collective justice and the rule of law.
- Rewards for innovation at all levels of life.
- Making famine a rarity.
- Rising human prosperity.

Christians may accept the blame for the ills of global capitalism and industrial scale ecological destruction, but should also get the credit for universal health care, the vote, human rights, the liberation of women, the possibility of innovation, and the improvement of human standards of living. Regulated social-capitalism is no less a product of the Christian imagination than was laissez-faire capitalism. Turn over any problem rock on the planet and you will find ardent Christians working through global networks to address it—including the radical critique of their own efforts.

There is no question the moral imagination of Jesus turns almost every conventional and respected thought about human values and ways of being on its head. There is no question that overturning leads to a world currently in danger of extinction. Yet it is also just as true that almost everything good in the current world is also a product of the Jesus revolution.

What critics of the Jesus revolution don't seem to want to acknowledge is that every framework of human action has its problems. There are no pure or perfect strategies for human development. Jesus has torn apart the world, but so has every other system of human action. To act is to destroy the world and make the future unknown. The moral choice is of the standard by which we tear apart the world.

My conclusion is that the way forward is more Jesus, not less. We must continue to focus on those at the bottom, suffering in the stinking cities and refugee camps of the Third World, as the standard by which we measure our own moral success. It is that focus which will lead us to new and better global, collective, industrial, economic, and technological solutions.

We do so in faith and hope and trust in a transcendent God who cares for us, even while leaving us to figure it out on our own. It's been the best approach to our collective well-being to this point and I don't see why, for all the problems, it isn't the correct approach to the future. In the name of Jesus we can confront and resolve many of the current problems.

Further, I don't think there is anything in the Jesus revolution that privileges wealthy white males. If anything, the Jesus revolution is the only real challenge those people

have to maintaining their place at the top of the colonial hierarchy. They have prospered because they dominated the culture that bought the Jesus vision, but the Jesus vision says nothing about their legitimacy, cultural, racial, or economic, to continue to run this increasingly global system of human action.

The Jesus vision thrives best on the basis of hard work and innovation in a capitalist system riddled with liberal humanist rights and complex state system of regulation and justice. It is a system with no intrinsic care about whiteness or maleness, and less as time passes.

There is no perfect future. There is only a world with more Jesus or less. I want a world with more Jesus. I'm convinced it is our only hope, especially for those on the outside of planetary success, those who suffer the ills of the current system the most. However, it is up to us to figure it out. Jesus has given us the most revolutionary moral vision the world has seen, but it is a long way from finished.

Amen.

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