

Jesus and Politics: Religion With Responsibility

One thing I love about the book of Revelation is its focus on the imminent return of Jesus Christ. It speaks of how He will defeat the kingdoms of this world, and usher in a new kingdom governed by love, justice, equality and truth.

When Heaven Becomes an Excuse

This hope in the soon coming of Jesus is essential to the faith-walk of a believer. However, as a young, black Christian man, the songs that speak of heaven are drowned out by the cries of those living in an earthly hell. Have we become so focused on glory that we have created a culture where hope in eternity is a sort of eschatological escapism?

I know that we are waiting on the return of Jesus, but I believe that the people of God should be working while we are waiting. Let's be honest, the world needs us, right now. If we are going to take on the name of Jesus, we must also take on the agenda of Jesus.

The Politics of Jesus

In Luke, Jesus said the Spirit anointed Him to proclaim good news to the poor, set captives free, and bring liberty to the oppressed. In spite of these verses, many have been taught not to engage in "social movements" or "politics." I would like to suggest that if we believe that Christ cares for the whole being, we should definitely use every resource possible to bring liberty to the oppressed among us, even if that means becoming engaged in the political process.

When there are policies that disproportionately impact the health of women of color, we must fight to change those policies.

When certain neighborhoods of predominantly black and brown people don't have adequate healthy food options, and the life expectancy rate of that neighborhood is lower than that of a majority white neighborhood in the next town over, we must get involved.

When the median wealth in white America is 10 times the median wealth in black America, we must do something.

Christians Engaged in Politics

It is possible to become politically and socially engaged without becoming corrupt. We shouldn't fight for power or prestige. We shouldn't engage with the hopes of lording over people. We don't even have to align with one particular political party. But when we see issues that are aiding in the oppression of people who cannot speak up for themselves, as believers, we have a responsibility to be their advocates. Here are three reasons why as followers of Christ we have the responsibility to be advocates and activists.

Reason #1: Jesus Advocated for the

Oppressed

The Bible is a book of hope to people who are either going into oppression, experiencing oppression, or coming out of oppression. The overwhelming narrative of scripture is that God always sides with the marginalized people of society. You cannot read scripture and come to the conclusion that God is the defender of the empire.

He is the God of the Hebrew slave.

He is the God of the young woman in Babylonian captivity.

He is the God of the forgotten leper relegated to the outside of the city.

He is the God of the teenage refugee protecting her newborn from a murderous king.

He is the God of the religious minority risking life and liberty in the shadows of the Roman empire.

In light of Scripture, our political activity should be for the purpose of advocating for the people God has called us to defend. We should support candidates whose agendas set out to present policies that make life better for the marginalized among us.

Reason #2: Our Communities Need More Than Charity

I remember being a child in church and discovering our congregation's food pantry. I remember my parents explaining to me that our church gave food away to people who were poor and didn't have the money to buy groceries. This was surely a noble deed. As I got older, I began to question why so many people who looked like me, and lived in certain neighborhoods needed food from church pantries?

Many of our congregations are known for doing charitable work in our communities. Let me be clear, charity is good, and necessary. Jesus said "I was hungry and you fed me, naked and you clothed me." Righteousness is demonstrated by meeting the present needs of people. However, at some point, we have to ask ourselves why certain people in certain demographics continue to need food, or help with rent, or services provided by free health clinics. Charity responds to the symptoms of a much deeper sickness. Certain communities remain in need because of systemic evil. Yes, we need to clothe the naked, but we also have to ask ourselves why our children can't afford clothing and new school uniforms? Why aren't wages keeping up with the rising cost of living? Yes, we should feed the hungry, but we must also deal with the joblessness and income inequality that keeps certain people groups food insecure. We should house the marginalized immigrant, but we must also fight against the policies that force them into hiding in the first place.

As we aim to tear down certain oppressive strongholds and systems, we must recognize that something as simple as voting, can make a big difference in the shaping of public policy.

Reason #3: Social and Political

Engagement Helps Our Witness

Finally, we as a church should engage socially and civically because it helps our witness. My pastor used to always say, people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. When the church fights for people's right to vote, marches in protest of a criminal justice system void of justice, and publicly supports policies that protect the economically vulnerable, people will be more willing to hear about our Jesus. It is possible that an introduction to Jesus the social advocate, can lead to a relationship with Jesus the savior.

So yes, let's look forward to the return of Jesus. He is our hope. But as we wait on Jesus, remember there's a world waiting on us.