

Paraklēsis : Humanity

Hello folks, I hope that your month was terrific. Mine was. I just returned from a 2 week vacation to Colombia, South America (and so this letter is a few days late...) I could fill pages describing all of the wonderful things we experienced there, detailing the adventures, the cultural differences, the great food, the conversations with family and friends, the amazing examples of God's creation that we just don't have in the northern hemisphere, the weather, the traffic, the economy, the World Cup, social norms, the environment and ecology, etc, etc... on and on I could go. I am exhausted, but refreshed. I am also reminded that this world is a really big place with a LOT of people in it. In Gen 9:7, After the flood, God said to Noah " As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it." As a people, we don't seem to have any trouble keeping that commandment.

The trouble is that greed and pride rule the hearts of many - and when the heart of a country's leader is filled with that, many, many people suffer. We all know some of the story of the tragedy in Syria - that is, millions of people (~12 million since 2011, half of them children...) have been displaced from their homes because of violence. Millions more are fleeing their homes in Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Myanmar and others because of violence and instability. The number of people displaced from their homes in the world today is **larger than it has ever been in mankind's history.**

Reading the statistics of "how many, from where, to where, and why" is pretty easy. But I stopped to consider **what would it take for me to flee my home** with my family and with only what I could carry in my hands to look for a relatively safe place where I could find food and shelter. As a husband and a dad, I shudder at that thought and I am grateful for the current peace-on-all-sides and the abundance that I have. Much of the news that we hear in the mainstream media regarding the refugee crisis is from the perspective of the host countries (those receiving refugees) and what should be done about illegal border crossings and the humanitarian needs and resulting stress on economies and resources.

Here's an ironic little side note... Throughout the 1970's, 80's and 90's, Colombia saw nearly 6 million people displaced from their homes due to conflict and violence (about the same number as that in Syria today.) 15% of Colombia's population was uprooted from their homes. But lately, the country is receiving many refugees from Venezuela. Things are changing for the better in Colombia, but not in the world as a whole.

Today, in the U.S., there is a lot of conversation regarding illegal border crossings, undocumented immigrants and alleged refugees - and the alleged treatment of those people by the government. The topic is controversial and divisive, and there is good reason for that. The issue is complicated, and I believe that if you push aside and ignore all of the persuasive rhetoric, the solution is not as simple as we might think. But, most of the rhetoric we're exposed to is from a secular point of view. I want to take a look at this issue from a Scriptural perspective. That is, "What Would Jesus Do?"

First, I want to explain a "filter" that I like to use... only as a thought provoking tool. That is, whenever God talks about Israel, the nation, I consider applying the words to myself, an individual. I don't think this is uncommon and I certainly did not come up with the idea myself. But I also, at times, reverse the assignments. That is, when God mentions "me" (an individual) in the scriptures, what would it look like if that were applied to "the nation?" There are a lot of potential questions and conversations that could come out of this - what is a Nation? what is the Church? how do I fit in as a small part of the Body? who

are the Brethren? who is my neighbor? who are God's friends? who are God's Children? who deserves God's mercy? who doesn't? With all of these questions (and potentially each person answering them in their own way...) I feel that I cannot emphasize enough that I am not preaching here. I am, however, absolutely trying to get you to think about these issues without any political or secular or pre-conceived opinion.

I have pasted here a number of relevant scriptures. I intended to supplement each with commentary, but after reading them, I cannot think of anything worthy to add. So, I will let God's Word speak for itself. Read these scriptures while considering the people fleeing from their homes with no other choice.

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** (2 Peter 3:9)

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. **All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another**, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 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; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, **to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.**' Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' Then He will answer them, '**Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.**' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:3-5)

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what will it profit a man **if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?** Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:25-27)

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:12-13)

"Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it." (Luke 17:32-33)

Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)

'When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; **you are to leave them for the needy and the alien.** I am the LORD your God.'" (Leviticus 23:22)

In John chapter 4, Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman and He offered her salvation. She was not of the nation of Israel. When God laid down His life for us, **was He certain that anyone would accept His gift?** Did He know that He would receive my love - or your love? God speaks often of a remnant, and in Romans 8, Paul speaks of some type of predestination... So, the answer is probably "yes," He did know that some would follow Him. And maybe some are not welcome into the Truth. Maybe there are some people that do not have the gift of eternal life available to them. But, I am confident that I do not have the wisdom or authority to discern who those people, children, neighbors, brothers, prostitutes, tax collectors, pagans, and heathens are. I would rather err on the side of compassion and generosity in the name of God, and risk being called a gullible fool in the eyes of men, than to be called an "accursed one" and be sent to the eternal fire by the Creator Himself. "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

I sense that there are opposing sentiments about this issue amongst the readers of this letter, but I am ignorant to those arguments. I am very willing to listen to and consider differing viewpoints. If I ever desired responses to my letters, now is my greatest. So, please, do let me know if you are convicted of a different mindset and why.

Peace to you and glory to God...

-Nate

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