

Do we muzzle the ox?

Prayer

Good morning, welcome to the house of the Lord. This morning we will be discussing several scriptures that deal with those who labor.

Do you believe that God is God of Justice?

Have you seen or know of people who are struggling and are underpaid? Have you known an individual making minimum wage and struggling just to get by? Does God care about natural provision or is he only concerned with ones spiritual well being?

My God has concern for all of creation. He sent his Son to die for them so that they may choose to become sons and daughters of the king. If we look at Deut. 24:8-25 we can see that God's leadership established all kinds of rules regarding justice for the less fortunate of the community. He put into place principles to ensure that all his people had their needs met.

A careful study of this topic will reveal that God cares and has placed a duty of care on his people for the immigrant or as the bible refers to them as aliens. This compassionate list includes the widows, the fatherless, even the beasts of burden.

Do you know that the scripture specifically states in 1 Tim. 5:17-18 that a laborer is worth of getting paid? He was so serious about it; that it became required by law. In fact, they were to be paid daily so that payment could not be withheld as a way to oppress the worker. If we look at Lev. 19:13 we see: "You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it..."

Now in our modern society we have offloaded much of the churches work onto social programs within the government. The church used to manage these issues with 10% of the increase in wealth the people of God experienced each year. Now many people in Canada work and through taxes pay about 50% of their yearly income to support the government. It seems evident to me that each year we pay more and more and receive less and less. Where we once had one of the finest medical systems in the world we are now not even in the top 10% Where we had the education in the top 3 countries of the world we now have slipped significantly.

Some countries in the world have made provision for the homeless and provide all education even post secondary to their populace free of charge.

Let's stop for a minute and take stock...

Where in scripture does it tell us to hand over our responsibility to care for the sick, the lame, the widows, the orphans, and the poor to the government?

Historically, the less fortunate have been cared for well by this offloading, but increasingly there are more and more people falling through the cracks.

So here is a hard question: "Are we as a church responsible to pick up the slack that has been created in meeting the needs of those who are struggling. Because we have outsourced that care to our governments?"

I mean the problem is so big; can the church even make a dent anymore? Yes it can!

One such example is our food program to provide much needed food to the food bank in Salmo. This is Godly. When we do this we do it as though we are doing it for God himself.

Turn with me to Matthew 25:34-40

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?³⁸ When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?³⁹ Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Clearly this is how God sees it. And as we read on in verses 41-46 we see that he is terrifyingly serious about it:

Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me."

Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?"

The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me."

Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."

Clearly, then practical ministry to the less fortunate has not been relegated to the government exclusively but rather we bear a responsibility despite our massive participation in governmental taxes. We do well with this outsourcing when the needs are being met, but we are not absolved of our responsibility to put works to our faith when they needs are not being met.

This is one of the most unpopular topics to preach today because it touches us in a very sensitive and abused area of our lives. Our wallets.

Everyday sometimes multiple times a day, we are approached by charitable organizations that promise to meet the gap and so we dutifully put our hard earned dollars to worthy causes to fix the problem, yet all too often we hear of the charity that takes 5-10% of the funds to meet the need and pad their pockets with the rest. Because of this we become jaded, hardened and quite frankly apathetic towards the need. We trusted someone else to take care of it and got burned.

We have given extensively to charities and sometimes it helps and others it doesn't, but we have tried haven't we?

Let's say you're a parent and you tell your son: "Son if you clean out the garage, I will give you \$20 and you can go to that concert you wanted to go to." For your son to receive the reward the job needs to be done and to standard." Now let's say your son calls a neighborhood kid and offers him \$10 to do the garage. Let's assume that the kid does an okay job but not all of it. Who is responsible for the work; the one to whom the task was assigned or the one who did not complete the work as expected? If the Job is not done right will you let your son go to the concert and pay him or would you expect him to complete that which wasn't accomplished to receive his reward? How do you think the Heavenly Father views this?

Our society has become very self-focused. We are in the top 10% of the wealthiest people on the planet. Yet, we struggle with debt, we struggle with time, we struggle

with dealing with more than our personal lives. We have become so busy and so overwhelmed with requests for our hard earned cash that we withdraw to our own families.

Companies are becoming increasingly more concerned with profit and less concerned with workers well being.

I remember when I was working for a local company. I had 6 weeks paid vacation; my contract paid me about \$85,000 a year and I had 20 paid floater days in case of family medical needs and 10 unpaid. Seems like a pretty good deal to me! Until I actually wanted to take some of my vacation... Then the company could not afford to part with me for the vacation days. This was all well and good until I tried to take my daughter for speech therapy on a five-day course. I was told that even to ask, I had a sense of entitlement. Those were benefits to be used in case of need. The company did not see my daughter's need as sufficient reason for a family-care leave. I was told I had a sense of entitlement actually expecting to be able to take the days. I was told that vacation days were at the company's discretion and they did not have enough staff for me to take them and so on...

So I had to pay someone else to take my daughter to her sessions. Did that alleviate me of my responsibility to my daughter or had I just handed off my responsibilities? For the record after a while I was convicted because she was struggling with my not being there to help her with it and so, I resigned and took her anyway. If it were working, would it have been okay? What if it wasn't?

In short, I have concluded that it seems that we can hand-off our responsibilities to another, but we remain responsible for the outcome.

Now if they did a good job with Rayya's medical intervention, and I was pleased with the outcome would they be worthy of pay? Julie and I pay my BI's for Rayya \$20 per hour for 12 hours per week. I also pay for food on excursions and extra curricular activity costs every day they are out. This includes costs such as swimming lessons, gymnastics, horseback riding etc.

A limited amount of funding comes from the government. And you go through hoops to get it. I have compassion for lower educated parents experiencing the same difficulties. But it doesn't pay all her costs... Who is responsible to pick up the slack? The Parents are because it is our responsibility and our child.

God has given us brothers and sisters and sons and daughters in Christ... And so we are responsible to do what we can and help those who fall between the cracks.

Do we help? Do we actually work out our faith or do we pay someone else to do it?

Now we have a small church with limited resources and yet I believe that God will provide what we need? God has a vision for his church, he has work for us to perform and he will reward us for doing it? Do we have the time, the resources or even the wherewithal to see it done?

This church helps the hungry; it pays me well for 20 hours a week to meet the needs of those who have fallen through the cracks. But this role, is not meant to be done alone or by just the Leadership. It is to be done with the support and efforts of the Body of Christ.

Now we were talking about the laborers in the field. Friends the community and the church ARE God's field. Turn with me to 1 Cor. 3:9. Here we see that Paul is referencing his earlier statement that whether it was himself, Apollos, Cephas or Barnabas, they are all workers in the local spiritual field of God. This field was known as the church at Corinth. Even though Paul had established the church, sowed the seeds of the gospel and essentially planted the congregation he was clear that Apollos and Cephas had a hand in the growth of the congregation.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

Church leaders who do their job well deserve to be paid twice as much, especially if they work hard at preaching and teaching. It is just as the Scriptures say, "Don't muzzle an ox when you are using it to grind grain." You also know the saying, "Workers are worth their pay."

Now deserving is different than ability to do this... Also what does it mean when it says: "Don't muzzle an ox when you are using it to grind grain"?

To understand what the scripture is saying let's turn our attention back to the example of the ox threshing in the field. What exactly is accomplished by threshing?

Threshing is the process of separating the wheat from the chaff. In short, it is the process of separating out that, which is useful to the master. The produce of which is used to feed the master and his household. While doing this the symbology is that the ox is also able to eat from the fruit of his labor.

So what?

Preaching the gospel provides the same function. It removes the grain from the chaff. Should not those who go out from the church and evangelize or do events or activities have the resources to do these things? Should they not be able to eat from the fruit of their labors?

Doing ministry requires resources and we need to meet the needs of getting the gospel out there into our community. Should we be supporting efforts to reach the lost? Shouldn't we help those who fall through the cracks? It becomes extremely difficult when the worker has to harvest a field without the tools required.

Now what about a spiritual harvest? The harvest is great and the workers are few. Who are those who work right now to bring threshing to the people of Salmo?

There are Bob and Sandy who work to bring people in to the church through games and movies about God. Should this ministry be supported with the church providing the movies and the popcorn? What about website maintenance?

How about Teresa and Julie who are doing a class and teaching the word of God with regards to dealing spiritually and scripturally with worry. Should we be helping them reach the people who cannot afford books? Should we be purchasing materials for the purpose of reaching the lost?

What about Lorne and Sandy who keep the administrative needs, and facilities moving forward every week. Should the printer ink, paper, fire extinguishers, toner, batteries etc. be provided to help them in these efforts?

How about Dale our worship leader who obtains music for our worship team to play? Should this be his burden alone?

I am not a legalist, but there are the sick, the lame, others who need help. They need more help than they receive and we as a church have a responsibility to care for them. Whatsoever we do unto the least of these we do as unto the Lord.

All that said: If an individual helps another and the person knows about it they have received their reward. If the person knows about the help a sense of debt or obligation may ensue. There is a tendency not to trust a church in our society. Satan brings about this lack of trust in churches. He has used corrupt churches to really sink his point home, so it is understandable there is some fear.

Consider what happens when the church itself helps individuals in our community. Where does the glory for helping go? Does it go to our selves or to God? When we give to the church, it supports ministry within the church. Now I am not talking about donations and stuff that people do to help the church, I am talking about making a person feel embarrassed or obligated because you have generously provided a bag of food or what have you to meet their needs.

Do we worship God?

Do we Love all People?

Do we embrace our Community?

Should these efforts for Christ be a struggle?

When Bob, Sandy, Lorne, Sandi, Teresa, Julie, Dale, myself or even others yet to be determined put their labor to the wheel to separate the chaff from the wheat and bring forth a harvest or do we drop it on them to find a way? Do we muzzle an ox when they are grinding the grain or do we provide what is needed to them? Do we abrogate our responsibilities or pick them up and press forward.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 CEV

Church leaders who do their job well deserve to be paid twice as much, especially if they work hard at preaching and teaching. It is just as the Scriptures say, "Don't muzzle an ox when you are using it to grind grain." You also know the saying, "Workers are worth their pay."

We know they deserve workers deserve it because God has said so. We know the principle here, but financial resources are scarce in the church to pay for materials, books, bibles, food, or whatever is needed. Some individuals will help; others will not, others may be embarrassed because they can only help a little. We live an abundant life.

How often as a pastor have I seen people who don't sign up for a course because they can't afford a book? How often have I seen people go hungry because they have scammed the food bank at some point in the past and now that their need is real there are issues. How often have I seen individuals' bear the burden of cost all on their own because individuals don't see the value of what the church does?

To be clear the church of Christ does not exist as an entertainment medium or social club for the righteous. It exists to seek and save the lost. It exists to show God's love to those here that need his love desperately.

The church is mandated to meet the needs of the people, yet without resources this is impossible. Our small church is doing what we can... so then how do we increase resources to meet the need?

We could include more people to share the burden or place a greater burden on those who are already taxed to the breaking point. A burden shared is a burden lightened...

We need to create communication around what the church is doing. A transparency if you will. We need to show evidence that funds given or tithed fulfill a need. We need to once again trust Christ's church regardless of the charlatans inclusive of unethical pastors who have used and abused the Christian ethic, even from within the ranks of the church itself. We need to take back what the enemy has taken from us.

Everyone can contribute! If not finances, then time, if not time, then encouragement. The truth is that helping people has a cost associated with it, whether that cost is finance, time or care.

The harvest is great but the workers are few. The church is to follow Christ's example and be compassionate.

Matthew 9:36-38

When he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them. They were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in."

This is my prayer this morning as it was Jabez prayer before me:

"Oh that you would wonderfully bless me and help me in my work; please be with me in all that I do and keep me from all evil and disaster!..." Some versions say increase my territory. And so I also pray that "God extend the influence of the church at Salmo this very day. I pray that the Lord God encourages and sends workers who will work for the harvest. I finally pray that our church will trust in God and in his provision for each of our lives. Finally, I pray that vision is established and that each and every believer in Jesus chooses faith over fear and works to see the kingdom of God established here."