

Fair Trade Sunday 2015

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[0 : 0 0] every tribe or every group of people has its defining markers. I thought for safety's sake, I might start with us. So North Shore people, you know, has defining markers like boat shoes, Range Rovers, polo shirts, that thing that we never admit about how we think we're better than anyone who lives anywhere else in Sydney.

Then, of course, there's the Westies who love stubbies, thongs, tattoos. Shoes, country people, who, from what I can gather from Steve, is basically boots, utes and guns, and perhaps a little bit of good hospitality.

Now, I know there are stereotypes, there are general, there are exceptions, but stereotypes exist for a reason. There's always something there. But what I wanted to ask is, what is it that marks this tribe?

What is it that marks Christians as distinct? Or, if you like to ask it another way, how do you tell if someone is actually a Christian? Or whether or not they're just kind of doing lip service to being a Christian and following Jesus?

What's the most important evidence of faith in Jesus? Is it attire? Socks and sandals? I had a friend in Bible college who purchased a Bible that was of the perfect size to fit in a satchel that he also owned, so that he would always be wearing his Bible in his Bible satchel.

[1 : 2 6] Is that the definitive marker of someone who is genuine when it comes to following Jesus? Is it maybe a personality trait, something that we don't want to admit, like being judgmental, being the moral police?

Well, there's probably lots of things that matter when it comes to being genuine in the way we follow Jesus. But tonight I want to look at one that, as you go through Scripture, is quite conspicuous and unavoidable.

And so I want to throw a whole bunch of verses at you really quickly. They're going to be on the screen so that you can read them with me. And then we'll come back and look at it in the end. So first up is Micah 6, verse 6 to 8. It says, He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Again, Luke 3, verse 11. Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none.

Anyone who has food should do the same. Psalm 41. Blessed are those who have regard for the weak. The Lord delivers them in times of trouble. Proverbs 14.

[2 : 5 2] Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. Isaiah 58. If you spend yourselves on 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.

And then James 1.27. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. That's a significant introduction sentence. You know you need to pay attention to what comes after that.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

One of the distinct markers of those who follow Jesus is a social conscience. And more than just a social conscience and an investment, a concern for those who are in need, essential to genuine faith is a heart that cares about the less fortunate, that cares about the widow, the orphan, the oppressed.

And look, on one level that just seems really obvious. It just makes sense. It just kind of fits with who Jesus is and what he was like. The general vibe of Jesus was to go and hang out with the downtrodden, to be nice to those that everybody else left to the side.

[4 : 18] But you might be wondering, given that we had a fair trade expo today, is this sermon just a bit of a fair trade beat-up? Am I just trying to pump the tyres of a particular cause that we're focusing on this week to try and, you know, get you revved up in that direction?

Well, maybe a better question to ask would be, why does this matter? Why is this so significant when it comes to testing the genuineness of someone's faith, someone's claim to follow Jesus?

I want to give you three reasons. I think there's probably more, but I want to give you three tonight that might be a good question, a good test for you in terms of whether or not this is distinctive in your life.

Three reasons this matters. Firstly, because all people matter to God. Not just some, not just good, not just Christians, all people matter to God.

If we go back to the very beginning of Scripture, the first thing that God does when He creates people is He creates them valuable. He puts an intrinsic dignity into people.

[5 : 29] When He creates humans, He puts His image on them. He by default creates them as something that is representative of Him. And so we need to look at all humans, local, foreign, friendly, enemy, whatever, as having some value, some importance, whether they're rich, poor, or otherwise.

I don't know if you've noticed that currently in our country as we debate whether or not we should accept refugees, and particularly Syrian refugees at the moment, well-meaning people are making suggestions like, maybe we should just have Christian refugees come in.

Maybe we should just have non-Muslim refugees come in. And maybe if you want to be generous it's a security fear, whatever it is, but as Christians from the very beginning of Scripture God doesn't distinguish values between different kinds of people.

He creates all people in His image. Muslim, Christian, Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, Australian.

Have you ever noticed how when there is a disaster in the world, whether it's a natural disaster, a plane crash, whatever it is, that we get given a particular emphasis in the story.

[6 : 52] So a plane has crashed, 300 people are dead, and there was three Australians on board. Or there's an earthquake, X amount of people are displaced, etc.

This many Australians were involved. Now, on one level, sure, we're in Australia, there's a chance we might know them, but have you ever asked why that detail is so important?

Why are those three Australians or ten Australians or fifty Australians more significant than the other 300 or 5,000 or whoever it is that's lost their life? Now, I want to be gracious because it's loss, it's pain.

There's so much emotion wrapped up in this sort of a topic, but I wonder if the reason that we go there first, I wonder if the reason we emphasise the Australians is because we tend to view the world through a lens that starts with me.

and so if they're Australian, it's more closely associated with me. I can more closely identify with who they are. My value almost gets connected to who they are, whereas if I've never met them or seen them, then it's still sad, but it's not the same, is it?

[8 : 13] But could it be that the Bible's painting a really different picture about the way God calls us to view the world? Could it be that every single person matters and is valuable?

The second passage that Jimmy read out for us in Matthew 25 is a scary passage in many ways. It's a picture of the final judgment. Jesus gathers everybody in front of his judgment throne and like a shepherd begins to sort between the sheeps, those who are genuinely following him, and the goats, those who maybe have paid lip service, those who have claimed to be Christian, but for whatever reason are not genuine.

And listen to the words. It says, the king will say to those on his right, this is to those who have been faithful, come you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation 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. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit 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? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

[9 : 34] When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? It's the key line. The king will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

God associates his own worth with his image bearers. The way that we treat people is directly connected to the way that we're treating God.

They're actually inseparable. He has designed our existence, he's designed our interactions and our relationships in such a way that our relationship with him is not just some abstract spiritual reality, but it is played out in our relationships with one another.

all people matter to God because he has created them as valuable. The second reason that this social conscience is so significant for us as followers of Jesus is that we've got to remember that the world's not supposed to be like this.

Now, sure, we live in a really, really privileged part of the world, but when we look at those news stories, there's this bit of us that goes, that's not right, is it? That's not what God intended.

[11 : 00] Again, Genesis 1, God's good design, creation itself has an inbuilt provision. There's this pattern in Genesis 1, when God's creating, he's walking around, let there be light, let there be sea, let there be land, let there be trees, let there be all these things, let there be animals, and eventually people.

There's a pattern. God always creates what is required for life before he creates the life. He creates the sea before he creates the creatures to go in it.

He creates the plants and trees and fruit and food before he creates the animals and the people to live there and be fed by it. Creation itself has provision designed into it.

And in fact, current statistics tell us the same story. There is enough food, enough money, enough medicine for everyone on the earth right now. But oppression and greed and injustice mean that there is an inequality of distribution.

It's not supposed to be like this. And so we've got to understand that what happened from that perfect design that God had to our kind of messed up reality reality now is not something that we can fix with money.

[12 : 26] It's not a matter of us turning around going, I need to be more generous. I need to be more caring. The issue that takes us from a good garden of Eden to a messed up right now is sin.

The problem and the reason this matters for us as Christians is because this is our core issue. Sin is the reality of us rejecting God, telling him that he doesn't matter, living as if we're more important, and sin is the reason that there is poverty in the world.

Sin is the reason that there is suffering in the world. Sin is the reason that there is pain and oppression and injustice. And what that does is tell us two things.

One, this isn't a money issue, it's a heart issue. And two, this isn't someone else's issue, this is my issue. Now I want to take a step sideways just for a second and just talk about sin and consequence.

What I'm not saying and what the Bible doesn't teach is that I be selfish here and look after myself and as a consequence God's going to make me poor later on. It's not sin and punishment like that, it's not that direct, but it's more like the collective consequence of sin, everybody's sin, results in this disproportionate allocation of wealth and starvation.

[13 : 48] It's kind of like if you wander along next to Sydney Harbour, you might see a plastic bag floating in the water, you might see somebody's Coke can, a Snickers wrapper, some sort of floating slick that you can't quite identify, it's not real nice.

And you might sit there at that moment as you walk past and think, man, whoever did that should have to pay. Those dodgy boat owners or whoever it is that's made that mess, they should have to clean that up.

But what you've got to understand is you're part of the problem. Every time you flush your toilet, it's got to go somewhere. I mean, it's treated, it's looked after, but it ends up in the ocean.

It's kind of like that with sin. It's not so much that your sin will have results for you, but ultimately a whole world full of people living for themselves instead of for God, a whole world full of people trying to look after themselves instead of each other, results in some people missing out, results in some people starving, some people living in what we would consider unlivable conditions.

And so there's an inbuilt warning for us today. Be very careful as you reflect on issues like poverty and oppression, slave labour, all that sort of stuff, be very careful not to look down on the perpetrators.

[15 : 15] Don't sit there and tut-tut at Nike and their sweatshops. Be sad, be concerned, be frustrated, but don't judge.

Because you sin too. You're part of the problem. I'm part of the problem. You and I contribute to the issues.

part of the issue. Part of why this matters for us so much as Christians, part of why this is a measure of the genuineness of our faith is because it takes us back to our biggest issue, our rejection of who God is, our rejection of his plan for our life.

And so tonight I want to encourage you, rather than feeling like a victim in a bad world, maybe instead you can put your hand up and confess that you're part of the issue. And then you can depend on God's goodness to forgive you and use you in spite of your weaknesses and limitations to still be contributing in a helpful way.

Poverty and inequality and oppression is part of a bigger issue. It's part of a sin issue. It's the issue that Jesus came to fix. I want to go to the Isaiah passage that was read out for us and if you can get that in front of you, I encourage you to have Isaiah 42 open.

[16 : 39] This passage comes at a point in Israel's history where they are in exile. That means they've been dragged away from their homeland. They're living as slaves, if you like, servants of another country, longing for a better time, crying out to a God who had promised to look after them.

And listen to this short few verses which is pointing towards Jesus. Listen to the description of what Jesus is going to do and how he's going to do it. Chapter 42, verse 1.

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and, this is his job, he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.

He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth. In his law the islands will put their hope. Jesus comes to bring justice.

[17 : 52] Now we know, we read the New Testament, Jesus comes to deal with sin and that's the point. They're actually connected. It's the same problem. It requires the same solution. In the book of Isaiah, justice is given a much richer definition.

Sometimes when we think justice, our mind goes straight away to a courtroom. We think about punishments given out. We think about people being maybe vindicated if they've been wrongly accused.

We think about this judicial decree. And that's part of the picture. That's the Matthew 25 picture where the King Jesus sits on the throne and says, you're a sheep, you're a goat.

He does decree, innocent, guilty, on board. But there's more going on here. What Isaiah does for us is help us to see that when God talks about justice, it includes all of his good intention.

It includes essentially his will. What the servant will bring is what was always supposed to be. What the servant will do is fix everything that's wrong.

[18 : 58] What Jesus does when he turns up is not just some abstract up there, fix some sin so that one day we go to heaven. He turns up to bring justice, to deal with inequality, to deal with poverty, to deal with all the symptoms of sin that exist in our lives, to deal with sickness and pain and frustration and anxiety and all these things.

You can see it in Jesus' ministry. Yes, he preaches. He says, come. He says, put your trust in me. Be forgiven. But he also feeds people and heals people and deals with physical needs because all of the inequality, all of the problems that we face in life come back to the same root issue of sin, of rejecting God.

There's something really cool about the way that the servant will bring justice. on one level, it doesn't sound inspiring when you think about the kind of opposition that you would face if you were on a justice crusade in our world now.

But listen to them. Verse 2. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break. A smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness, he will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth.

[20 : 25] He will face opposition, but the means by which he will bring justice is not force, but sacrifice. At his cost, at his expense, we can be vindicated.

God goes to extraordinary lengths to fix what's wrong with the world. He sends his son so that people like us who tell God whatever we don't care can actually have a relationship with him.

But more than that, he sends his son so that people like us who treat each other like we don't matter, or at very least treat each other like I'm number one, can actually have the kind of relationships we were supposed to have.

The kind of relationships we were designed to have of service and love. This matters for us as Christians because all people matter to God and it matters because it's not the way it's supposed to be.

It's not the picture of God's good design at the beginning. It's not the picture of what Jesus has achieved and we're going to enjoy in heaven. And now that Jesus has come, the work he has begun, he has entrusted to us to continue.

[21 : 50] To defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow. plus this is evidence of his grace to us.

This is how grace plays out. It shifts our perspective on life and the things that we do. In my previous church, I had a friend who I did ministry with.

I'm not going to mention his name because it's a pseudo-incriminating story. He's a good guy. I love him. He loves Jesus. He's fantastic. He was a great resource for me. One of the rules that you have in ministry or that I have in ministry is that you should never pay full price.

Mainly because I don't have enough money. And so whenever we're running anything, I'm trying to get a discount. I'm trying to sort of wrangle a deal. I want a cheap bus. I want a free bus. I want the pizzas for a discount. I want whatever I can do to not pay the full price for things.

He took this to a whole other level. We used to run quite a big youth ministry camp. We had sort of 400 plus people on this camp. And he would get us like seven minibuses for free like that.

[22 : 54] Like he had people tripping over themselves, competing with one another to give us good deals. He just, I don't know how he did it. One year on camp, it was like 40 degree plus. We were in this big barn for our meetings.

It was horrific. Kids would get bleeding noses from the heat. It was terrible. And so one year he turns around to me after being on the phone for 15 minutes. He goes, oh, I've convinced a company to travel down, set up portable air conditioning in the hall.

And then at the end of the week, pack it up and take it away for free. I'm like, that's great. But how? I remember one time in particular, we were just out to dinner.

It wasn't ministry. We went to the good old all-you-can-eat Pizza Hut. Really is a sad reality that they're all gone. Just have a moment of pause and lament over the fact that that's not around.

Anyway, we went to Pizza Hut all-you-can-eat. It was a good value restaurant. For those of you who missed that reality, which actually might be a few of you, it was just like a smorgasbord of pizza and you could just keep going back and back and back.

[23 : 54] They had like a dessert bar as well, so all the soft serve you can eat. It was amazing. So the only thing lacking was refillable soft drinks, but you know, that's for another day. So we're in Pizza Hut.

We're eating pizza. We're chatting. We're having a good time. And it comes to the end of our meal and it's almost time to pay. And I notice he, my friend gets up and disappears. Sort of didn't think heaps of it.

Maybe he's going to the bathroom, whatever. And the manager happened to be sitting in a booth a couple of spots away. I think she was doing the figures for the night. They were getting ready to close up. And I noticed out of the corner of my eye that my friend sat down on her table and obviously they were chatting.

And a few minutes later he comes back and he goes, okay, we can go. And I said, did you pay for dinner? He said, no. I said, do we need to pay for dinner? He said, no.

I went, okay. Sounds good. And out we go. And it wasn't until we got outside that I went, wait a minute. Why don't we have to pay for dinner? What just happened? And he says to me, well, I just explained to the manager that the pizza available on the All You Can Eat bar wasn't of sufficient variety that I could actually call it All You Can Eat.

[25 : 02] And also the time, amount of time that it took for our drinks to arrive after ordering at the beginning weren't sufficient to be serviced that we should pay for. And she agreed, and so they agreed, that our dinner would be free.

Now let's remember that All You Can Eat Pizza Hut was a whopping \$5.95. Generous savings. Now, like I said, I love my friend.

He's good value. He is a blessing in many ways. But I was reflecting this week on something that he maybe has in hyperversion, but is true of all of us.

The way we approach all of our interactions like that, where there's money involved, where it's shopping, eating, whatever, the number one dictating factor for us is, maybe I'm speaking out of turn, but I don't think I am.

The number one factor is, how can I get the best deal for me? Think about it. You go shopping for something, you go from shop to shop to find the cheapest place, and then you go online to get it even cheaper once you've found the right size.

[26 : 10] It's how we shop. And it makes sense in so many ways, that like, that's logical, I don't want to pay any more than I have to. But can you see that behind that mentality is an attitude of, this is all about my outcome.

This is all about my experience. There's not even a level of awareness or engagement of the person on the other side of the counter, let alone the person who drove whatever it is and delivered it to the shop, let alone the person who made it, let alone anyone else.

The driving thing for us is, me. Me. The reason issues like poverty and caring for those in need matter when it comes to being a Christian is because it's a reflection of the change that God has worked in us.

See, it makes sense to look after yourself. It makes sense to try and provide for yourself. It makes sense to get the best scenario for you unless somebody else has already done it.

See, if you claim to be a follower of Jesus, what you're saying is, God loves me. God provides for me.

[27 : 38] God gives me so much more than I could possibly need or deserve. God has guaranteed my eternal future. God has forgiven me. God has given me every good thing in my life.

And so actually, it doesn't make sense to then go out into the shops and live as if you need to look after number one. You need to get the best deal for you.

Because actually, God is already looking after you and He's told you in Scripture that He cares about the person on the other side of the counter. He cares about the person that made that shirt or that coffee or whatever else it is.

They're valuable to Him. The Christian life is a redefined reality.

We have a new starting point. See, the issue back at the beginning when we talked about that news story that tells us about the three Australians, and again, I do it. I'm not casting judgment on you.

[28 : 42] I do it as well. I go, oh, you know, three Australians. That's really sad. The issue there is that the reason that's sad is because that connects to where I am. Because the way I view justice and poverty and everything else in the world is defined by how it connects to me.

But as a Christian, that's not how we view the world. The world is defined and sin is defined and the issues in the world are defined by how does this relate to God. And God says, every person on that plane matters to me.

God says, every person who's making a shirt or a shoe or a meal or whatever it else is matters to me. And then He says, I'm going to look after you. So we don't have to shop anymore with this fear of who's going to look after me.

We don't have to live our lives anymore with this fear of what about me? God's got that covered. So I guess just to finish, I wanted to ask the question, where does a Fair Trade Expo fit?

Whether you made it here today for the Fair Trade Expo or not, you know roughly the gist of it. Fair Trade basically means two things. One is you pay a little bit more for the same product. Then you have to.

[30 : 03] And two, the person who's making that product gets paid what they deserve. That's what Fair Trade is. There's a whole bunch of other stuff about investing in their businesses and enabling them to be sustainable and doing training and lending of money and a whole bunch of other things which you can research and all sorts of stuff.

But a Fair Trade Expo, where does it fit when it comes to checking our social conscience, our love for the poor? Well, it's not the solution. Buying Fair Trade won't fix poverty in the world because we know that poverty is a symptom of sin.

Only Jesus can fix that. But what something like Fair Trade does or just giving generally to those in need does is it gives us a chance to remember, to remind ourselves that we don't have to be worried about me because God is.

It's a chance to remind ourselves that as we go looking for the things that we need, and I use that very loosely, God has already provided it all. Maybe it gives us a chance to get a bigger picture of the kinds of people that live in the world with us that God cares about that matter and the kind of situations they're living in.

But more than anything else, shopping, Fair Trade, giving to those in need, caring for people who need it is a chance for us to come back and just again be reminded of the confidence and hope we have in Jesus.

[31 : 51] A Fair Trade Expo is not designed to make you feel guilty. This sermon is not designed to make you go and spend more on Fair Trade this Christmas or feel guilty about every present you buy or anything like that.

It's kind of not the point. The point is God loves you. God has provided for you in Jesus and so you don't have to stress with the what about me question anymore.

You're released to go and love and invest in people that you'll never meet but who right now live in conditions that we just wouldn't tolerate.

It's a chance for you to be reminded that the things of this world are temporary and all the things that really matter can't be taken away anyway. It's a chance for you to loosen your grip on the things that God has given you so that you can tighten your grip on Him.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father God, we want to admit that sometimes when we look at things like this it's really easy to realize that we suck at this.

[33 : 11] It's really easy to get distracted by feeling guilty, to get distracted by failure, to maybe push this message away because it's not comfortable but God, but God, help guilt not to be the destination for us.

If there is guilt, help us to give it to you. Help us to remember that you love us in spite of who we are. That one of the gifts that you give us is to take our guilt on yourself, to take our shame away, to release us.

God, thank you for your patience with us as we stumble and as we keep trying to grow into this life that you have designed for us. God, right now there are so many people in this world that you cherish, that live with less than what they need.

Please enable us to be a blessing for them. Enable us to be bringers of your justice, to proclaim the hope of Jesus, to use what you have entrusted to us so that you might get glory, so that people might recognize that you are a God who cares.

You are a God who provides. Father, thank you for placing us here in this church at this time with these resources. Please so shape our hearts that we might be faithful with what you have entrusted to us.

[34 : 44] Amen.