

ANCHORS 7¹

Real Responsibility: “least of these”

Last week we examined why real responsibility should be the beating heart of every Christian. We desire to lessen God’s sorrow, and to bring joy to His heart at the recovery of His lost ones: thus we “Invest & Invite” people into our lives, and into the Christian walk! But real responsibility calls us beyond just reaching the lost ones we interact with in our daily lives. This week we’ll look at how real responsibility calls us to reach out to, and care for those less fortunate than us.

In our passage tonight, we read about a time where the Israelites had gotten off track (again). They were fasting and partaking in other “religious” acts, but weren’t living out the heart of God in the world as His people. What are religious acts like fasting or sacrifice worth if the overflowing acts of the heart are callous and uncaring? This is what we now call legalism- doing something purely because it’s the rule and not from a place of love in your heart. The Lord corrects the Israelites’ meaningless ways of showing their godliness, and tells them what “true fasting”, or true relationship with God, looks like put into action. It is to feed the hungry, break the chains of injustice, and to care for those in less fortunate positions. When we take real responsibility for those less fortunate we take part in God’s plan that we, as the church, should be the hope of the world.

Isaiah 58:6-12, NIV

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness[a] will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in 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. 11 The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. 12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

Matthew 25:34-40, NIV

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me

Pre-Article Questions:

1. If you were able to attend our large group worship service this week/past week, how did God speak to you through the worship or the message?
2. Describe a time when someone helped you out or gave you something that you could not give yourself, how did it impact you?

Matthew 25:34-40, NIV continued

something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 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.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Study Questions:

1. Open the Bible and read Isaiah verses 1-5, according to these scriptures, what were the Israelites doing wrong and what were they doing right?
2. What kind of fast has the Lord chosen? What does He explicitly say (v6-7)?
3. Compare the people described in Isaiah verses 6-7 with those described in Matthew 25:35-36, what do all of these groups have in common?
4. Is there a group of people or a disenfranchised population that tugs on your heart? Why or why not? In what ways does your heart break for those described in our previous question? In what ways is your heart calloused for those described in the previous question?
5. Isaiah 58:7 says a curious phrase: "your own flesh and blood". How would seeing those less fortunate than us as our "equals" change the way we reach out to them? In what ways does the gospel, Jesus' life and death, in of itself, compel us to reach out?
6. List the promises of both these passages of scripture to those who care for the less fortunate and "least of these." Which one touches you the most and why?
7. Describe a time when you felt you received one of these blessings as you acted on this passage? How did it shift your relationship with God and others for the better?
8. Reflect on the phrase in Isaiah v12: "Repairer of Broken Walls and the Restorer of Streets with Dwellings". What would it mean to be this in our modern world? What are broken boundary walls you want to see restored? Empty places you want filled with life again at your university and in your Life Group.
9. Overall, in what ways are these two passages encouraging and challenging you tonight?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner this week and read all of Isaiah 58. Talk about what is sticking out to you, encouraging you, and challenging you. Spend some time praying, and then taking action together, in the remainder of your time to do a random act of kindness for someone in need that God places on your heart as you pray.

Closing

Spend some time talking about who the disenfranchised are that you can take real responsibility for right now as a college student? How? Discuss some practical ways your Life Group can take real responsibility for the least of these in the area, in XA community, or for a member in need right now in Life Group, this week, or for the remainder of the semester.