

**LOVE THE LAND: LOVING THE LEAST**

**November 26, 2017**

**INTRODUCTION**

Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 when He said, “*The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*” (Luke 4:18-19). God loves the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40). As Aaron said on Sunday, the heart of God beats for the poor, the disadvantaged, the weak, the oppressed, the broken, the hurting, the hungry, the estranged. If God’s heart beats for the least of these – does yours?

**SCRIPTURE**

*<sup>1</sup>Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. <sup>2</sup>For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. <sup>3</sup>‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. <sup>4</sup>Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup>Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup>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? <sup>7</sup>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? <sup>8</sup>Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup>Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: ‘Here am I’.*

Isaiah 58:1-9

**GROUP QUESTIONS**

1. When you see someone begging at an intersection or freeway off-ramp, what thoughts go through your mind? How do you feel toward that person? How do you typically respond?
2. Read Isaiah 58:1-9. What is the tone of this passage? What would cause God to use this tone?
3. List the things the Israelites are doing (verses 2-3a). Since the things they are doing are all good things, why does He say that the Israelites are in rebellion (verse 1)?
4. What injustices are denounced (verses 3b-4)? How are these injustices seen in our community, nation, and world today?

*Study Questions for Community Groups*

5. Read the following passages. What does each passage say about “loving the least”? What does this mean for you in today’s culture? Who are “the least”?

Psalm 82:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Proverbs 31:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 22:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Zechariah 7:9-10 \_\_\_\_\_

Micah 6:8 \_\_\_\_\_

6. When discussing Isaiah 58, John Piper said, “*Piety that does not produce a passion for God-exalting social justice and practical mercy is useless.*” God’s heart beats for the least of these. Does yours?

**APPLICATION**

1. **GROUP:** Brainstorm - Consider the various needs the hurting and broken people have in your community. Make a list of tangible things you can do to “love the least”.
2. **PERSONAL:** Throughout the week, examine your motives for doing spiritual disciplines (Bible reading, fasting, praying...). Ask yourself the following questions; if you answer ‘yes’ to any of them, ask God to forgive you and to help you seek Him with your whole heart with the sole motivation to know Him more.
  - Do I secretly hope that others will look up to me because I am so spiritual?
  - Do I think that God will notice the sacrifices I make and will give me special attention?
  - Do I feel superior to those who do not seem as spiritually disciplined as I am?

**FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. Read Matthew 25:34-46. What coming event does this passage describe?
2. List the actions Jesus will use as basis for His judgment. Since salvation is not a result of good works (Ephesians 2:8-9), why does Jesus use good works as the dividing line in this passage?
3. Would you change your attitude or actions towards the “least of these” if you viewed them as Jesus (Matthew 25:35-36)? Why or why not?