

Thought for the Day 12th June - John Reed

Read Matthew 18:10-14

I, like most of you I suspect (I hope!), have been greatly disturbed by the death of George Floyd in America two weeks ago. There are elements of the public response – the rioting, looting, and reckless flouting of social-distancing measures – that I take issue with. But the callous and needless death of a man at the hands of a policeman in such a manner is deeply, deeply, concerning and upsetting.

It has sparked “Black Lives Matter” protests around the world. Now, some have countered this by saying “surely we should be saying ‘All Lives Matter’?” And that’s true. We should be arguing for the value and sanctity of *all* human life – regardless of age, gender, language, or colour of skin.

I have been reflecting on this a lot these past days – and reading a lot and listening a lot. And I came across a sermon online where a pastor was defending his support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Clearly, some – either in his congregation, or from outside – had taken issue with his position and told him that he *should* be saying that *all* lives matter. I found his response (and I would give you a link to it, but I can’t find it right now!) thought-provoking. He referenced this parable, of the Lost Sheep. He imagined someone challenging Jesus’ concern for the lost sheep and suggesting that surely *all* sheep matter. And he imagined Jesus replying that of course *all* sheep matter. But right now, these 99 sheep are safe and that one is lost – so that’s the one that matters at the moment.

You see, Jesus cares for *everyone*. But he is addressing here the fact that some people seem to value some lives more than others. Note how he introduces this parable (verse 10): “See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones ...” And his conclusion (verse 14): “So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” It seems that there were people around him who saw other lives, other souls, as being of less importance and value than their own – whether it be by dint of their age, or their ethnicity, or their cultural background. And Jesus won’t have a bar of it. *All* lives matter – which means that *this* life matters to God.

This fits with a consistent pattern throughout the Bible that God has a heart for the deprived and underprivileged – not because they are more valuable than anyone else, but simply because many of us are inclined to treat them as *less* valuable, and he wants to redress the imbalance.

Consider, for example, the following passages (and there are plenty more like this):

Exodus 23:6 “You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit.”

Leviticus 19:9-10 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.”

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 "God, who is not partial and takes no bribe ... executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing."

Proverbs 31:8-9 "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."

1 Timothy 6:17-18 "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty ... They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share ..."

James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction ..."

James 2:1-4 "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"