

Did Jesus Believe in Immigration Restrictions?

We have heard endless bloviation from media types who have spent their entire journalistic careers in open hostility to Christianity suddenly pontificating about how un-Christian it is to build walls and restrict immigration to the United States. Why, we're told, that's not something Jesus would do! He himself was a refugee! How can you call yourself a Christian and not believe in letting anybody and everybody in? That's what Jesus would do!

Now we know that people who think and talk like this are wrong. When Jesus came to Earth, He did not come as a refugee. He came as the rightful king, intent on reclaiming what had been stolen from him by the prince of darkness. When His parents took Him to Egypt as a child, they didn't go as refugees but as exiles who returned to their homeland as soon as they could. When His parents took him to Bethlehem, they didn't go as refugees, they went as hard-working taxpayers doing their civic duty.

Biblically, we know that there is a legitimate place for walls, for physical barriers designed for protection. God sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem to build one around the city to keep the bad guys out. We know that immigration bans under the right circumstances are appropriate, for God permanently banned immigration from the neighboring nations of Ammon and Moab because of their historic and implacable hostility to Israel.

But we know that building walls and using immigration restrictions are legitimate policies because Jesus will use them in His own kingdom.

(I am indebted to my good friend Jeff Reed for this idea, but don't blame him for anything in what follows that you don't

like. That's on me.)

The Scriptures tell us that the eternal city of Jesus' coming kingdom will be surrounded by "a great high wall with twelve gates" (Rev. 21:12), each guarded by an angel so undocumented intruders cannot enter.

Identification papers will be scrutinized carefully before anyone is allowed to enter through one of the great big beautiful doors that are built in this wall that surrounds the city. In John's vision, "books were opened," and "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life" he was not only refused admittance but "thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12; 15). Talk about extreme vetting and deportation.

Only those who "wash their robes" in the shed blood of Christ will be allowed to "enter the city by its gates" (Rev. 22:14). Those who refuse to adopt the values of the eternal city will remain outside its walls. "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev. 22:15). In other words, cultural assimilation will not be optional for someone who desires a place in this coming kingdom.

Immigration controls will be stout, and deportation for those without proper documentation will be enforced. The king will apprehend those who try to sneak in and pass themselves off as citizens when they are not, and say to them, "Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

How do would-be immigrants get their names written in this register, this book of life, so that they will be admitted through the gates on that day? How do they get the visa, if you will, that entitles them to enter the kingdom of God?

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). All prior allegiances must be renounced, and Jesus must be acknowledged as their new sovereign. They must accept Him not just as Savior but as

Lord. Once they do, their citizenship is granted, their passport is stamped, and they are welcomed to their new kingdom. This citizenship process is open to anyone in the world, anywhere, at any time.

We have my great-grandfather's immigration documents hanging on the wall of our living room. In order for him to become a citizen of the United States, it was necessary for him to "renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to all and any foreign Prince, Potentate, State and Sovereignty whatever, and particularly to the Czar of Russia, of whom I was a subject." Then he was required to declare his new allegiance to a new source of ultimate political authority, the Constitution of the United States.

The earthly process of becoming a citizen of the United States is a parable, a reflection, a shadow, of the process of becoming a citizen of the eternal kingdom. Perhaps God even intended it to be just that, and we cloud the picture when we make foolish changes to sound immigration policy. To be sure, it's a shadow only, since the eternal kingdom is perfect and America is not.

In the kingdom of the age to come, documentation is required, a profession of allegiance is required, the borders are patrolled, and intruders are expelled. If that's how Christ governs His heavenly kingdom, earthly kingdoms can be governed in the same way.

Does Christ believe in immigration control and border security? Of course. And if He does, it's OK for the United States to believe in them too.

And the ultimate lesson for readers of this column is this: Be sure you have your visa in hand because no one knows when the day of ultimate migration will come. {eo}

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