

What Would Jesus Say About Today's Retail Theft Epidemic?

You've probably seen the videos of thieves filling trash bags with stolen merchandise from CVS or walking out of Home Depot or Wal-Mart with armloads of tools, laptops, detergent and athletic shoes they didn't pay for. We used to call this shoplifting, and it was a crime. Today, it's known as "inventory shrinkage"—and it costs retailers billions of dollars in losses. But many soft-on-crime politicians are treating criminals like victims and allowing the crime wave to grow.

Some retailers are locking items behind glass cases, but that hasn't stopped brazen criminals who just smash and grab. Other retailers actually warn employees not to try to stop thieves—and they will even fire an employee for confronting a shoplifter. Welcome to the USA in 2023: We were once known as the land of the free; now we are the land of the free-for-all, where criminals can take whatever they want from store shelves knowing that no one will stop them.

It's no secret that retail theft is at an all-time high in the United States. Target will lose half a billion dollars this year to shoplifting, the retailer recently announced. Nordstrom, Whole Foods and other stores announced in May that they are moving out of San Francisco because of increased theft.

Crime has become so bad in Oakland, California, that residents are leaving the city. Darren White, a member of Oakland's NAACP, blames "defund the police" policies for the rise in crime in his city. "I'm a Black man born and raised in Oakland," White told CNN on August 8. "When I walk out of the

house every day, I want to be safe. So if that calls for some, whoever commits the crime, to be prosecuted, so be it.”

The NAACP in Oakland has actually called on the city to put more cops on the streets of Oakland. But I won't hold my breath while waiting for things to change. Our nation has been afflicted with a spirit of lawlessness. Up is down, wrong is right, theft is justified and thieves are defended. In lenient California, someone can steal up to \$950 in merchandise and only be charged with a misdemeanor.

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I've even heard some Christians downplaying the problem of retail theft. They say, “The big businesses already make an insane amount of profit,” or, “Stores have insurance to cover the losses,” or “The retailers are the real thieves because they don't pay their employees enough.” With that attitude, we might as well give criminals the keys to stores and let them loot them all.

Here's the bottom line: Stealing is wrong. The right to private property is at the bedrock of any healthy society. Exodus 20:15 says, “You shall not steal”—and those words were not written by Moses. They were actually written by the finger of God Himself, according to Exodus 31:18. Nowhere in Scripture does God minimize the seriousness of theft:

- Jesus said that “thefts” are among the many evils that flow out of the wicked heart of man, along with murder, fornication and adultery;
- Jesus compared the devil to a thief (see John 10:10), and Judas, who betrayed Jesus, regularly stole money from the disciples' ministry funds;
- When the tax collector Zaccheus met with Jesus, he was convicted of his thievery and he pledged to help the

poor, offering to pay back four times what he stole from people (see Luke 19:8);

- The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 that thieves will not inherit the kingdom of God. Yet he acknowledged that some people who had been thieves were forgiven of their sin because they repented;
- Paul also urged the Ephesians: "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." God calls us to stop stealing and to start giving!

In today's woke culture, university professors and media pundits tell us that we should enable people who steal, feel sorry for them and look the other way when they run out of the store with \$3,000 worth of items that they will later sell on the black market. Today, woke politicians even dare to speak of "justice" while decriminalizing theft and letting dangerous criminals out on the streets without even a slap on the wrist. That is not justice. That is insanity.

Lord, deliver us from this evil! I'm praying that God will give us leaders who have the courage to confront this lawless spirit that is spreading like a cancer in our nation. We need to build communities where laws are enforced, police officers are trained to respect life, judges rule fairly and criminals are prosecuted so that businesses can prosper and citizens can walk the streets in safety.

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