



"The New Colossus" is a poem that American poet Emma Lazarus wrote in 1883 to raise money for the construction of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. In 1903 the poem was engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the pedestal's lower level. The poem on the statue of liberty says this, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" As a nation, we once prided ourselves on endorsing those words, but lots has changed since then. Immigration, more than any other topic we've looked at in this series, is probably the most hotly debated political issue of our day. Do we close the border or open the border? Do we grant asylum to all illegal immigrants in our country or deport them? How does immigration and all it entails affect our country economically, socially and politically?

I'm not a politician. Nor do I fully understand all the complexities around this topic. But, here's what I do know. Immigration is not just a political issue; we are talking about real people and their families. We are talking about people made in the image of God. So, the question for us as followers of Jesus is, *how should we respond?* How are we to develop a biblical, graceful, loving ethic around immigration? How do we love God and love our neighbor? Christians are divided over how to answer those questions as well. What I'd like to do first is briefly survey several passages from the Old Testament that talk about foreigners, those who we might consider immigrants today.

God Has Always Called His People to be Generous to Foreigners

Look with me first at Deuteronomy 10:18-19, "*He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*" What we see here is a window into the heart of God. His people, the nation of Israel, were once welcomed into Egypt as foreigners with open arms during a severe famine. But, after Joseph died, the Pharaohs forgot about him and at some point enslaved the Jews. What started as a relationship of mutual dependence turned into oppression for 400 years. The Israelites were well acquainted with the weight of oppression and being the outsider. God points to that history and reminds them of how they should be treating foreigners. He challenges Israel to

love foreigners because God loves them and you were once in their shoes.

God also made it clear in his law those seeking refuge in the land of the Israelites were to be granted hospitality. Listen to Leviticus 19:33-34, "*When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*" As Israel wandered in the desert and as they settled in the Promised Land, God gives them clear directions in how to treat the foreigner and the immigrant living among them. He says, "love them as yourself."

Those are just two of several passages in the Old Testament that speak about how to treat immigrants. There is also the entire Book of Ruth we could talk about. Ruth was a poor Moabite (non-Jew) while Boaz was a rich Israelite. Boaz was willing to be generous to Ruth, a foreigner, and allowed her to glean in his harvest fields. Ruth and Boaz get married and many many generations later God's Son, Jesus Christ, would be born from this lineage.

Now, just to be fair, there are Biblical scholars who argue that the idea of "foreigner" or "sojourner" or "stranger" in the Old Testament is very different from our current idea of immigrant. These foreigners in the OT were said to have "entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien." In other words, those were legal immigrants in the OT. They would argue that we have a historically different situation today, much different than that of Israel in the OT. I personally don't hold this view. Yes, God wanted his people to be separate from other nations, but that prohibition was primarily in place to protect their hearts from idolatry. Legal or illegal, God wanted his people to love the immigrant but not accept their gods or pagan practices. The principle to love and care for them is clear. And while that is true, the Bible also tells us today about our secondary obligation to uphold the laws of our nation.

We Have a Secondary Obligation to Uphold the Laws of Our Nation

In this teaching series, we've referred to Romans 13 several times already. It's there we're told by the Apostle Paul to submit to governing authorities and not rebel against them. The government and all those in authority are put in our lives by God for our good and protection. This means, as followers of Jesus, we need to obey the laws of the land. Many well intentioned Christians hold

to the belief that our borders must be closed, immigration policy must be reformed, employees must be held accountable for hiring illegal immigrants, we should deport all known criminals, and finally, we should put together a difficult but possible path to full citizenship for illegal immigrants who are already here.

However, other well intentioned Christians would argue that the easy thing is to lash out at all undocumented immigrants and call them "lawbreakers" while citing Romans 13 and demanding their deportation. They would argue that the issue is far more complicated than that. Yes, undocumented immigrants are violating the law, but many of them are doing so in order to provide for their families back home. Immigrants often fear authority and therefore many are being exploited. Illegal laborers are frequently paid much less than citizens which creates cycles and generations of poverty. Those who suffer the most are often children and families. Many of them are also leaving awful situations back home as well. Richard Land, president of Southern Evangelical Seminary argues that the message our nation seems to be sending across the borders is, "Keep out" and "Help wanted."

Immigration and all the subject entails is a monumental task to deal with and it brings up so many political challenges. I do believe we need to figure out a way to secure the border and protect those who patrol it and those who risk their lives to cross it. We should hold business accountable for hiring illegal immigrants and those who exploit them. We need a realistic way of providing legal status for the millions of immigrants who are already here. Most of them are in legal limbo, with no country to call home. You may disagree with me on these issues for valid reasons and I'm not pretending I have any answers. My point is that we need to figure out a way to honor the law and honor God. How can we give to Caesar what is Caesar's and God's what is God's? So, on the one hand, God has always called his people to be generous to foreigners but on the other, we have a secondary obligation to uphold the laws of our nation. It's a tension we are constantly managing, not a problem that can be fixed overnight.

Let's look finally at what Jesus has to say about this. Remember, Jesus himself was an immigrant and had to flee with his parents to Egypt when he was a baby. Turn to Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus told a story called sheep and goats.

The Story of the Sheep and the Goats

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"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. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 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.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"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.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

In this story Jesus was talking about the future coming judgment of God. Jesus said when he comes in his glory with his angels, he'll be like a King who sits on his throne with all the nations gathered before him and he'll separate people like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be told to go on his right, the goats on his left. Honestly, I know more about cats and dogs than I do about sheep and goats! So, almost every time I read this story I feel bad for the goats. Why do the sheep get to be the good guys while the goats are stuck being the bad guys? Then I read somewhere if you asked a shepherd what sheep are really like, he'll tell you they're stupid. If you ask him what goats are like, he'll tell you they're stubborn. That made sense to me. The good guys that get to go to heaven may be stupid but at least they submit to the King. But the bad guys are stubborn, they don't submit to anyone; in fact, they fight against the King.

Now, if you carefully read the whole the story, that's not at all how it goes. If that were true then when the King showed up the goats would immediately know they were in trouble because they had never submitted to him. But that's not what happens. In the story, the goats are completely surprised by the reason for their judgment. And here's the kicker: the sheep are just as

clueless and surprised as the goats! Not only do the goats ask how come they're goats, the sheep ask how come they're sheep. The difference between sheep and goats isn't the difference between stupidity and stubbornness—they're both stupid; they're both clueless—the difference and the key to understanding this story is the way they treated the King's friends who were in need. The sheep will be recognized by the small, unremembered acts of kindness and love they never even thought really mattered.

Some people read this story and are led to think that the whole basis for our judgment is whether or not we help those in need. If I throw some change in a Salvation Army bucket at Christmas, I'll get into heaven. If I work at a soup kitchen on the second Saturday of every month, I'll get in. If I help an immigrant get a job, I'll get in. But that can't be true because it goes against so much of what Jesus said elsewhere. It's not just about earning your way into heaven by helping the poor, the needy or the immigrant, it's about coming to Jesus Christ out of a deep sense of need and letting him meet that need. When you do that you'll also be willing to identify yourself with him and his people even when it gets you in trouble. When you do that, you'll become like these sheep, you'll become the kind of person who practices small, unremembered acts of kindness and love you never thought even mattered.

Have you ever tried to picture yourself standing before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? I have. I've pictured myself in this story this week, standing before the King and here's what I imagine:

The King says to me, "Rob, can I see your Google calendar?"

I say, "Well, yes, Lord. Let me borrow your computer and I'll log in and check it out."

"Look up June 7, 2007."

"Oh yes, Lord, I remember that day. That's the day I was awarded my Master of Divinity degree at graduation."

"Well, I never go to those things. They bore me. But do you remember what happened later that week? As you were cleaning and packing up your apartment, you gave some of your furniture to a poor family in the neighborhood who needed it. Do you remember that?"

"Ahhh, I guess so, Lord."

"Well, I remember it. When you helped that family you were helping me."

"Look up September 13, 2008."

"Oh yeah. I remember that day, Lord. It's the day I preached my first sermon at CPC. I don't even think I cried! It was a good sermon too Lord, from the book of Acts, remember it?"

"Not really! But do you remember how later that week your wife made homeless care bags and you gave one of them to that man asking for money?"

"I forgot all about that, Lord."

"Well, I remember it. When you gave food to that man, you were feeding me."

Here's what's so cool about God. You don't need a seminary degree to feed someone who is hungry. All you need to do is give away your lunch. You don't need some amazing spiritual gift to visit someone in the hospital who is sick. You just need to show up. You don't even need a PhD to visit a prisoner. I believe, that as followers of Jesus Christ, our compassion demonstrates that our heart has been changed. It means you've moved from a me-centered life to a we-centered life where you seek to meet the needs of others. The whole point of this story is to demonstrate how our response to the most vulnerable among us is a response to Jesus Himself.

What does this story mean in terms of immigration? Our response to the most vulnerable among us is a response to Jesus Himself. In my opinion, some of the most vulnerable among us today are illegal immigrants and refugees. There are upwards of some 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country right now. Nearly two million people enter the United States every year, many of them illegally, with an annual waiting list of over 15 million. U.S. immigration policy today grants only about 1 million permanent visas a year (with about 70,000 for refugees). That may sound like a lot, but it represents 0.3 percent of our population of 321 million.

How the church responds to immigrants is at the heart of our mission. We can either lash out at them or love them, but we simply can't ignore them. Our churches must be the presence of Christ to all people, regardless of country of origin or legal status. We also need to stand against bigotry, harassment and exploitation as well. And most importantly, we must love our brothers and sisters in the immigrant communities. That means we need to be the presence of Christ to and among them because the kingdom of God is made up of those from every tribe, tongue, nation and language (Rev. 7:9).

This hit home for me last Saturday. My wife and I took our kids to the City Impact conference and we volunteered to serve at a kid's carnival in the heart of the Tenderloin district in San Francisco. As kids and families from the neighborhood poured into the carnival, I expected to see lots of Latinos and African American families. Instead, what I saw was Vietnamese, Laos, Cambodian, Latino and the most surprising of all, Yemenis people. More than half of the people who came out were women and children from Yemen. Yemen is a Muslim country just below Saudi Arabia. It's

a closed country and Christians are not allowed to proselytize there at all. And there my family was, in the Tenderloin, surrounded by women and girls from Yemen in head scarves; all of them immigrants; illegal or not, I don't know. But my heart was filled with joy because we were showing them the love of Jesus in a very practical way. "Here's a balloon and Jesus loves you." Our response to the most vulnerable among us is a response to Jesus Himself.

By way of application, allow me to offer a few ways you can apply this message. All of us can pray for immigrants and refugees who are living in our communities right now. They are your neighbor, whether you want them here or not. Some of us can donate money to organizations who help those who are vulnerable. Today, you'll have an opportunity to give to World Vision who are working with Syrian refugees. You can pray, you can give, but some of you can go and help. We are sending another missions team to Greece to work with Syrian refugees. If you are interesting in going on that trip, email McKenna Mitchell. All of us can show compassion for immigrants who live in our cities. We might even think of ways to cross the culture gap between your family and their family and culture. For me, that meant taking my kids to the Tenderloin. Maybe for you that means occasionally grocery shopping at the Carniceria or Ranch 99 down the street instead of Safeway.

And finally, many of us were born here in the United States. Some of us have made the U.S. our home and country. But, if you are a follower of Jesus, that means we are all immigrants in the kingdom of God. Listen to Ephesians 2:12-13, ***"remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."***

Russell Moore writes, "Immigration isn't just an issue. It's an opportunity to see that, as important as the United States of America is, there will be a day when the United States of America will no longer exist. And on that day, the sons and daughters of God will stand before the throne of a former undocumented immigrant. Some of them are migrant workers and hotel maids now. They will be kings and queens then. They are our brothers and sisters forever."

We may disagree over immigration policy, but we should never disagree on immigrants as people.

Blessed are You, Lord Jesus Christ.

You crossed every border

between Divinity and humanity

to make your home with us.

Help us to welcome you in newcomers,

migrants and refugees.

Blessed are You, God of all nations.

You bless our land richly

with goods of creation

and with people made in your image.

Help us to be good stewards and peacemakers,

who live as your children.

Blessed are You, Holy Spirit.

You work in the hearts of all

to bring about harmony and goodwill.

Strengthen us to welcome those

from other lands, cultures, religions,

that we may live in human solidarity

and in hope.

God of all people, grant us vision

to see your presence in our midst,

especially in our immigrant sisters and brothers.

Give us courage to open the door to our neighbors

and grace to build a society of justice.

(Dominican prayer)

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2016 Central Peninsula Church North, San Bruno, CA
Catalog No. 1422-8N

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, July 31, 2016 at Central Peninsula Church North
300 Piedmont Avenue | San Bruno, CA 94066 | 650 349.1278 | www.cpcweb.org. Additional copies available on request.