

The Control Freaks in Our Midst

The story of Jesus feeding some 5,000 people, as told in the books of Matthew and John, is well known throughout the world. It goes like this:

As a large and hungry crowd gathers to hear Jesus, his disciples nervously ask him how so many people can be fed. The only food in their midst consists of five loaves of bread and two fishes. Jesus informs his associates of some rich people who live nearby. "Go and take what they have and give it to these who want it" he commands.

So the disciples raid the homes of the rich, as well as a grocery store and a bank, and redistribute the proceeds to the grateful multitude. After the event is over, Jesus lobbies Roman authorities to raise taxes on the rich and fork over the loot so that next time the disciples won't have to go steal it themselves.

Of course, that's not the real story at all. Jesus never commanded anyone to swipe somebody else's property, not even for a "good cause."

Matthew and John convey a different message. As the throngs gathered, Jesus asked his disciple Philip a very capitalist question: "Where shall we *buy* food for these people to eat?" John 6:6 tells us "He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do." And then Jesus did it: Using his unique power, he created new wealth without pilfering a crumb from anyone. He multiplied the loaves and the fishes until the crowd was fed.

As I explain in my new book, ***Was Jesus a Socialist?***, Jesus never expressed sympathy for the socialist agenda: political redistribution of wealth, the concentration of power,

government ownership of the means of production, central planning of the economy, or a welfare state. He encouraged personal responsibility and charity and never hinted that one can accomplish those things by passing the buck to vote-buying politicians. His "Good Samaritan" was good because he helped a needy man by choice and with his own resources. It's your heart that counts, not your big mouth.

"But Mr. Reed, you're not defining socialism correctly. It's workers owning stuff in common and running the businesses where they work!" That's deceptive, window-dressing baby talk. My response always is, "What's holding you back? You can do that under capitalism, as long as you do it consensually and voluntarily." But socialism is not about consensual arrangements and voluntary participation. It's about centralized power and compulsion.

It's also about the grotesque satisfaction socialists get from controlling others and punishing people they don't like. Socialists want much higher taxes. The primary reason is not good things the government might do with the money. Socialists would support higher taxes if the government dumped the loot in the Pacific. Their satisfaction comes from hurting those they envy. They count the other guy's blessings, not their own.

If that weren't so, they'd be making personal donations to the welfare department now. The last I checked, the "Donations" line in the federal budget says "peanuts."

It may be harder for a socialist to get to Heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Why? Because getting there does not depend on one's political beliefs or good intentions. That is a matter of the heart and soul, not of politics.

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