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New Covenant Fellowship

Thinking about the immigration issue Biblically

Immigration is not just an issue in the U.S. It is an issue for every county. It is not just a modern issue. The story of migration and immigration has been a major part of the story of humanity. And so, not surprisingly, we see it is also very much a part of the story of God's people. And just like today we will see that people become immigrants for a number of reasons: work/employment, safety, fleeing famine, war, violence, political unrest and instability, being exiled, escaping injustice, etc. We have a sizeable community of Congolese immigrants in C-U today, who fled the war and violence of Congo.)

So let's look at a few of those stories.

I. The Bible as a story of immigration and emigration

(This list is not necessarily comprehensive)

Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22-24)

Cain went to Nod (Gen. 4:16)

After the Tower of Babel, God scattered the people all over the earth (Gen. 11: 7-9)

God asked Abram to leave his home of Ur and go to Haran and later Canaan. (Gen. 11:31-12:9)

Abraham went to Egypt with Sarah to flee famine. (Gen. 12:10-16) and later returned to Canaan (Gen. 13) and again (Gen. 26)

Hagar and Ishmael were sent away to the wilderness of Paran (Gen. 21:8-21)

Jacob fled to Haran to escape Esau's anger and to find a wife and ended up staying there for years, before returning to Canaan. (Gen. 28-33)

Joseph was sold as a slave and taken to Egypt. Years later his entire family joined him to escape famine. (Gen. 37-50)

Moses fled to Midian after killing an Egyptian taskmaster (Exodus 2:11-22)

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and towards the promised land (Exodus 12 ff.)

Ruth left her native Moab with her mother-in-law and came to Israel (Ruth 1-4)

Elisha tells a woman to “sojourn wherever you can” because a famine was coming. She spent 7 years in the land of the Philistines (II Kings 8:1-3)

Esther and Mordecai were exiled in Persia. (Book of Esther)

Some of the Israelites, including Daniel, were taken to Babylon after the siege of Jerusalem (Dan. 1)

Later Ezra and Nehemiah led some of their people back to Jerusalem (books of Ezra and Nehemiah)

David fled Saul and spent some time living among the Philistines (I Sam. 27)

Jesus came from heaven to earth (John 1:1-17)

The baby Jesus was honored by 3 wise men from other lands, who sojourned in Judea to find him.

Jesus and his parents fled to Egypt and remained there until Herod died (Matt. 2:13-23)

Due to persecution, early believers were scattered (Acts 8:1), some to Samaria

Paul was a Jewish man who straddled two cultures (a Jew born in the Roman city of Tarsus) (Acts 16:37, 21:39)

Jesus sent his disciples into all the world (Matt. 28:19-20)

II. Specific scriptures regarding immigrants

Psalm 146:9 “**The Lord watches over the sojourners** he upholds the widow and the fatherless.”

Lev. 19:33-34 “When a **stranger** sojourns with you in your land, **you shall not do him wrong**. The stranger who sojourns with **you shall be to you as the native among you**, and **you shall love him as yourself**; *for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*”

Lev. 23:22 ““And when you reap the **harvest** of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, nor shall you gather the **gleanings** after your harvest; **you shall leave**

them for the poor and for the **stranger**: I am the LORD your God." (see also Deut. 24:19-21)

Deut. 14: 28-29 "At the end of **every three years** you shall bring forth all the **tithe of your produce** in the same year, and lay it up within your towns; and the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the **sojourner**, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, **shall come and eat and be filled**; that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do."

Exodus 23:12 "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day **you shall rest**; that your ox and your ass may have rest, and the son of your bondmaid, **and the alien**, may be refreshed."

Deut. 24: 14-15 "**Do not take advantage of a hired worker** who is poor and needy, **whether** that worker is a **fellow Israelite or a foreigner** residing in one of your towns. ¹⁵ **Pay them their wages each day** before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin."

Malachi 3: 5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; ..., against those who **oppress the hireling in his wages**, the widow and the orphan, against **those who thrust aside the sojourner**, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts." (ie. immigrants and the poor are not disposable)

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.

Ezekial 22:7 In a recitation of the sins of Jerusalem Ezekial says "the **sojourner suffers extortion** in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you."

III. The Biblical ethic of welcoming the stranger/alien/sojourner/foreigner

1. Understanding that the alien/foreigner/stranger/sojourner is made in the image of God

(Genesis 1, especially verses 26-31)

"Then God said, "**Let us make man in our image**, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

2. Loving God and loving our neighbor

Matt. 22: 35-40 "And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself**. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

Matt:25:35-40 " ... 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.**'"

3. Practicing hospitality

Abraham welcoming strangers:

(Gen. 18-1-6) "And the LORD appeared to him [*Abraham*] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on -- since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.""

Hebrews 13:2 "**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.**"

4. Understanding that believers are to consider themselves as aliens and strangers in the world

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were **strangers and exiles on the earth**. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a **homeland**. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a **better**

country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Phillipians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ ...

This 3-faceted look at what the Bible has to say about immigrants applies to all immigrants, not just those “with the appropriate documents.” God’s heart clearly goes out to those “sojourners” who are living on the edge, who are poor and vulnerable to abuse and oppression. In our day and culture, this most certainly applies to the undocumented immigrant as well as the documented immigrant.

Who are the undocumented immigrants?

It is estimated that there are 11-12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Of these, 40-50% come to the U.S. on a valid Visa but overstay the Visa. They come from all over the world (Asia, Europe, Canada, Africa.) Around 90% of these come from places other than Mexico or Central America. Undocumented immigrants from Mexico account for about 56% of all undocumented immigrants, just a little over half of them. In 2019 that percentage dropped to less than half <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/us-unauthorized-immigrant-population-2017/>.

Why do they come without going through the proper channels?

For many if not most of them, there is no legal way to come.

Inability to find work in their home country (sometimes in part due to U.S. policies)

To escape grinding poverty

To escape unrelenting violence (as in Syrian refugees today)

To be able to feed their children adequately and give their children a future with hope

To reunite with family already in the U.S.

To plant, raise and harvest our food

To live rather than die

They often have to make very difficult choice with very few options.

Coming across the U.S./Mexican border can be dangerous and life-threatening. With the increased militarization of the border, immigrants without documents have to use

more difficult and life-threatening routes, and more are dying in-route. This is not a choice they would make if they had better options.

Undocumented immigrants are vulnerable to abuse

Eduardo's mom was treated exactly the opposite of how we are instructed to treat immigrants, as we heard earlier in the teaching.

Here is her story:

"Good morning. Well, I could really stay up here all day talking about what my mother went through when she immigrated to this country. I am blessed and I was very lucky that she actually was the one that went through all this trouble and all this suffering and I didn't have to. But I'm just going to share her beginnings. She actually immigrated to the United States, well not immigrated, she came to the United States in 1965. And like many other undocumented people, she ended up working in the garment industry in Los Angeles, California. She came to that industry without experience as a seamstress. She came to this country alone. She didn't know anybody. She didn't speak English. Because of all that, the employers really took advantage of people in her situation. For the first employers that she had she even was denied her wages and there was really nothing she could do to fight the system for fears of being deported and she just kept moving from factory to factory, hoping and praying that the next job that she landed she was actually going to get paid for her labor.

Her reasons for coming to this country were simple: find a better life, opportunities to make money so that she could send for us to come to this country and join her so that we could be a family again. But unfortunately for her she soon realized she had more exploitation and abuse than opportunities. And as long as she was undocumented there was really not a whole lot she could do about her situation. So she worked very, very hard to start the process of legal residency

not just for her but for us when we joined her in 1972. Finally we were blessed in 1974 with our green cards. But before then I remember my mother working extremely hard, long hours just to make enough money to put food on the table and to pay rent and to take care of three children.

There were sometimes back then when some of the employers really, really would not just hold wages but made them work so, so hard. She would work up to 16 hours a day just to clear \$8.00 a day for her wages. And some of those ... even one of her employers used to fine them up to \$10 just for talking during the job or taking too long on a bathroom break and that was really hard for all of us.

So needless to say, back then, these factories, the garment industry, were nothing more than sweatshops, where employers would take advantage of illegal aliens and withhold their wages, threaten with deportation, increase abuse and, like I say, I was fortunate that I didn't have to go through that. The Lord blessed me with getting my citizenship in 1980 but that, of course, did not come easy for the family. It was only through the grace of God that I am here standing in front of you. And every day I thank God for allowing me to be here and I thank my mother for all her efforts and her sacrifice for bringing me here to this wonderful country of ours. Thank you."

Immigrants and the law

Romans 13: 1-2 "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

These verses do not cancel out all the previous Biblical teaching, as some seem to think.

Questions to consider:

Are our immigration laws just?

If not, can we look to the example of the abolitionist movement against slavery or the civil rights movement in the 1960s to inform our thinking about making immigration laws more just? Human laws are not perfect and sometimes unjust. This is a valid question to ask.

How do we value people?

Many politicians and talking heads speak of undocumented immigrants in terms of their cost to the U.S. in money and resources.

But they leave out how much they contribute to our society and our economy.

God's view of immigrants (whatever their status) and all people: they made in his image. Not just a commodity value or economic unit.

Reframing

What if ...

Instead of viewing immigrants as burdens and drains on our society and its resources, we would choose to see them as gifts to us?

What if God means to use immigrants to enrich our lives ... or refine our faith?

What if God means to bless us through Christian immigrants by teaching us more fully who He is through them?

Can we also enrich and bless the lives of immigrants in our midst?

What does the kingdom of God look like?

Luke 13:29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. (see also Ps. 107:1-3)

Communion

The great equalizer

We all need Jesus' forgiveness, mercy, grace, redemptive work in our lives.

Resources/Sources:

Books:

"Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate" by Matthew Soerens & Jenny Hwang, 2009 IVP Books

“Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible” by M. Daniel Carroll R., 2008 Baker Academic

“Immigration and the Bible” by M. Daniel Carroll R. (MissioDei Exploring God’s work in the world, Number 19, 2010 Mennonite Mission Network)

“Thinking Christianly About Immigration” edited by M. Daniel Carroll R., 2011 Denver Seminary’s Vernon Grounds Institute of Public Ethics (Monograph Series)

“God’s Global Mosaic: What We Can Learn from Christians Around the World” by Paul-Gordon Chandler, 2000, IVP Books

“The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration” by Isabel Wilkerson, 2011 Vintage Books (an internal migration)

Useful websites:

Welcoming the Stranger (World Relief)
<http://welcomingthestranger.com/>

Mennonite Central Committee sites
<http://washington.mcc.org/learn.what/immigration>
<https://mcc.org/stories/extending-welcome-along-us-mexico-border>

Sojourners on immigration
<https://sojo.net/join/campaigns/immigration>

Christians for Immigration Reform
<http://faithandimmigration.org/>

Evangelical Immigration Table
www.EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com

Online resources

Border toolkit
<https://worldrelief.org/border-toolkit/>

On southern border realities:
<https://mcc.org/immigration-webinar-series>

YouTube

Daniel Carroll Rodas on reframing immigration 10-12-20

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9poGAhb8p0>

and immigration legislation and the Old Testament

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSh31RqfHwE>

Alexia Salvatierra at the 2009 CCDA Conference (42 minutes and 4 seconds)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQzaMDCVgg8> (or google "Alexia Salvatierra and CCDA and youtube")

Articles

Immigration and the Lord's Supper

<http://www.ekklesiaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/How-the-Lords-Supper-Changes-the-Immigration-Conversation.pdf>