

Jesus Was Not a Liberal

By Dan Jensen (2024)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. I also recommend reading my essay on LGBT+ stats. All of these can be found on my website.)

I recently read an article from Vox,¹ that most ridiculous of outlets, on how Jesus was basically a liberal just like them (how convenient). The article is somewhat old, from last year. I’m honestly not sure how I came across it. It was written by Aja Romano, who goes by *they*. So, right off the bat that gives you some idea of where the article is coming from. And in case Romano or anyone else wants to say that this reflects my anti-trans bias, I am not against any individual person. I am against insidious ideologies.

Not all people who consider themselves “trans” are alike. It is the LGBT+ movement that is full of prejudice. Either agree with them wholeheartedly or you’re automatically a bigot. And if any person who thinks of himself or herself as “gay,” “lesbian,” or “trans,” does not get in line, he or she is a traitor. The truth is that we all know many people in that vein who do not toe the line. The dirty little secret is that the LGBT+ movement does not speak for all such people. This makes them very, very upset when you point this out, but it is the case and we all know it. As just one example, we all know “lesbians” who are rather annoyed with the entire “trans” movement and its male encroachment into their spaces. I am always kind to all people as much as possible. I have worked with “trans” folks without issue. So, sorry, but no dice my friend.

Before plowing forward, I want to anticipate an objection. And that is that I am conveniently making Jesus out to be a conservative every bit as much as Romano is

¹ Aja Romano, “The Chosen, the Christian megahit about Jesus, explained,” Vox, accessed Apr 15, 2024, <https://www.vox.com/culture/23807450/what-is-the-chosen-series-why-so-popular-controversy>.

making Him out to be a liberal. Actually read my works. I routinely critique fellow conservatives, both political and theological. I have been very critical of the love affair with Trump that exists within so much of the church. I am a Confessional Presbyterian. Even most Conservative Evangelicals have no idea what that means! I am hardly seeking to follow the crowd for popularity. And I have said that in many contexts, Christians should indeed be liberal. Please see my essay where I am reviewing my debate with Tony Jones as one example of this. It can be found on my website. Christians living in Iran today, as just one example, most certainly cannot defend the conservative status quo of that nation. I am not saying I am perfect in my theology. I have no doubt I get many things wrong on secondary matters. But, I can say with a clear conscience that I have always sought God very fervently to help me through His Spirit to be as biblical on every matter as possible. I don't care where that leads or what people think of my conclusions.

Getting back to the article, Romano takes the typical liberal approach and merely assumes that Jesus was a veritable modern "American" liberal without proof. This position is always seen as so self-evident within these circles that it is almost unthinkable that they would even need to provide any semblance of a defense for their take. The article is a critique of *The Chosen* and Romano at one point writes, "[*The Chosen's*] avoidance of politics is so deft that it never does the Christlike work of challenging its audience's concepts of unconditional love, government oppression, and what it means to truly embrace the marginalized." I would argue that the show actually does a lot of this. But, Romano plainly means that unless it does it according to liberal presuppositions it cannot possibly be doing so at all.

The idea that Jesus was pretty much exactly like 21st century American liberals is anachronistic in the extreme. I have written about how the very concepts of *liberal* and *conservative* always have to be placed against whatever cultural backdrop is in play in order to determine if it is biblical to be more one or the other. Again, one key example of where I have done this is in my review of my debate with Tony Jones.

In no context should any Christian seek to be solely one or the other. In many respects, Jesus was “liberal” for His day. Among the common people, the Pharisees had the most social power by far. Jesus was hardest on them. In that sense, He was indeed challenging the conservative powers that existed in His cultural context. However, the Sadducees were largely the hated group, despite their immense political power. This was largely because of their corruption and their elitism. One could of course argue that challenging corruption and elitism is a most liberal virtue. This is why trying to shove 21st century American political categories into the past just doesn’t work. The fact is that the Pharisees were seen as the conservatives. They were seen as those who were trying to preserve ancient Judaism. Most Jews agreed with their understanding of the Jewish canon. The Sadducees were seen as reductionists on that front. And if we are to make comparisons to today, it is the liberal progressives who insist that we not believe in huge swaths of Scripture, very similarly to how the Sadducees argued. With all that in mind, despite how vehemently opposed Jesus was to the Pharisees, on many points He often sided with them quite passionately against the Sadducees. Hence, in many respects He was quite the conservative.

Yes, Jesus talked a ton about helping the poor. Yes, Jesus often talked about the marginalized and how we are to seek them out. He also modeled both of these teachings to perfection. But, Jesus almost never got political. That is a fact. Liberals, despite how often they accuse us of this very thing, see the world in very binary terms. There are almost always only two ways of looking at something according to them. Either you help the poor and the marginalized almost exclusively and primarily through political channels or you don’t believe in loving and helping them at all. Nope. We can also love and help them directly. This is far more impactful and is far more in keeping with what Jesus modeled for us. Liberals love to make themselves feel better by checking a box at the voting booth. By doing so, they can shirk their duty to love people directly, pawning that off onto others, while feeling like they are the most empathetic folks in the world because this is what their liberal leaders tell them.

I am not saying that this is true of all liberals. Many do indeed engage in the hard work of loving people directly. But, these are the minority among them. This is especially true of wealthier white liberals. I grew up around them and I know them all too well. How many of them have run a homeless ministry? Very few. But, I have. How many of them have gone on mission trips to help such people? Very few. But, I have. How many of them give to charity? Very few. But, conservatives routinely outgive liberals when it comes to charity. Study after study has confirmed this. Often when we would be feeding and talking with the homeless in downtown Santa Cruz, many uppity white liberals would come out of the restaurants and mock us for being Bible thumpers. That happened more than once I can assure you.

Now, I am not at all denying the need for political activism. Nor am I denying the fact that the teachings of Jesus imply this. The fact remains though, that this was never ever the focus of Jesus. One has to provide an absolutely tortured reading of the Gospels to come to any other conclusion. To simply point out how often Jesus taught and modeled our need to love the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed is not a defense of modern American liberalism. It is nothing more than to just assume your position and then eisegetically read it back into the Gospels. With that said, almost all are agreed that when systemic government oppression exists, we should do all in our power to fight against it through whatever political means are available to us. At the same time, political change always comes slowly. This is why it is so important that we as the church do all we can to help those people directly in the meantime. Liberals just always assume that we as conservatives don't do this. This reflects some of the worst ignorance and prejudice in our society today. Spend any amount of time around an actual orthodox church and you will see differently. I have been immersed in the world of Conservative Evangelicalism, all over the world (CA, Mexico, HI, NC, Scotland, NV, and UT), and I can promise you this.

Further, the idea that when we do fight politically, we must always do so in a liberal manner is nothing more than self-congratulatory nonsense. As just one example, the so-called war on poverty has only made things for poor people in this country

exponentially worse. This is especially true for minorities in this country. And yet liberals never tire of doubling down on their position that if we would just keep throwing more money at the problem it would be fixed. “Yes, it would(!),” they shout. Um, no it won’t and time has more than borne that out. When we posit far better solutions like education vouchers, something that is actually extremely popular among many poor minority people in our nation, we are called racists. Jesus would have fought against this rubbish with all of His might. So, don’t tell me I’m failing to be Christlike when I do the same.

Returning to what I was saying about the binary mentality that is so pervasive among liberal thinkers, allow me to unpack one other example. Liberals love to think and say that there are only two ways to approach LGBT+ people. One either affirms them or one hates them. But, this is not so. Yes, those who hate them are repugnant. No one disagrees there. However, one can also love and befriend them while being honest with them. This is what Jesus would have done. He did that type of thing all the time throughout His ministry. Yes, He accepted people from all walks of life, but on the condition of their repentance. I agree that He often helped those who were not fully repentant and we should as well. We can absolutely be friends with all sorts of non-Christians. But, He never allowed anyone to be considered His follower apart from repentance. Unconditional love is never ever equated to unbridled affirmation by Jesus. NEVER. Jesus repeatedly made it clear that most people would end up in hell. God’s unconditional love must be carefully qualified if we are to be biblical.

Yes, Jesus accepted tax collectors. If they repented and left that lifestyle. Yes, Jesus accepted the sexually immoral. If they repented and left that lifestyle. Yes, Jesus accepted violent extremists (like the Zealots). If they repented and left that lifestyle. Countless other examples could be given. Hence, when we as Conservative Evangelicals demand the same of people today in His name, we are being obedient to Him. When liberals like Romano twist His words, they are blaspheming His name.