



## Inside This Issue:

### Page 2

Thank You!

*The Temptations and the Rise of  
Authoritarianism in America*

### Page 3

Upcoming Events

Quotable Quotes

### Page 4

Recommended Reading for  
March

### Page 5

*Social Jesus* blog

### Page 6

*Just Talking* with Herb and Todd

Weekly Zoom HeartGroup

### Page 7

RHM's Socials

RHM's Free Resources

Budget Thermometer

### Page 8

*Social Jesus* Podcast

*Finding Jesus...* available on  
Amazon



### Follow RHM!

 Renewed Heart Ministries

 renewedheartministries/

 renewedheartministries

 renewedheart.bsky.social

 herbandtoddjusttalking

 renewedheartministries.com



## The Temptations and the Rise of Authoritarianism in America

by Herb Montgomery; March 1, 2025

Our reading this week is from the three temptations in the gospel of Luke:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

(Luke 4:1-13)

The current political environment in the U.S. has given us a different lens to read Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness through as this text, once again, rolls by in the lectionary. For readers today who have a difficult time with this story’s language and characters (such as a devil), remember that this story was written for people in that culture, not ours. This year, I would like you to consider not the fantastic nature of the story but the idea that this story, written in that fantastic flavor, was a conspicuously veiled critique of the political, economic, social, and even religious system of the society that the audience of Luke’s gospel lived in. It was written for those who had the understanding to perceive it.

The very first words Luke’s “devil” speaks to Jesus was to question: “If you are the Son of God...” Remember, “son of God” was one of the titles attributed to Caesar. Over and over again, Luke contrasts Jesus and his “kingdom” with Caesar and the Roman Empire. They are alternative ways of doing life collectively together as human beings. So the very first



## Thank You!

We want to take this moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of our supporters for your support of Renewed Heart Ministry’s work of love, justice, and compassion. At a time when ministries like ours are being asked to achieve more with fewer resources, your support is so deeply appreciated, and we want to simply say thank you. Whether in our larger society or within our local faith communities, Renewed Heart Ministries remains committed to advocating for change, working towards a world that is inclusive, just, and safe for everyone, and being a source of love. From all of us here at Renewed Heart Ministries, thank you for your generous support. **We deeply appreciate you.**

If you’d like to join them in supporting our work, please go to: **renewedheartministries.com** and **click on “Donate”** or you can **mail your support to:**

Renewed Heart Ministries  
PO Box 1211  
Lewisburg, WV 24901

**From all of us here at Renewed Heart Ministry,**

**THANK YOU.**

*Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.*

*continued on page 2*

question this story is asking is on what grounds does Jesus and his way of doing life replace Rome and its way of doing life. In other words, “If you, Jesus, are the son of God instead of Caesar, then...”

And that leads us to Jesus’ very first temptation—turning stones to bread. Bread was one of Rome’s central promises to its citizenry. By the time the gospels were written, Rome’s grain dole was well established. Each citizen was assured a measure of grain on a regular basis, and this was one of the ways Rome sought to ensure riots and rebellion did not break out throughout its territories (see Bread and circuses). Those who controlled the bread ultimately controlled the people, and one way to motivate clients of Rome to cooperate was that these regional rulers could turn their stony, arid, less than suitable agricultural lands (i.e. stones) into bread by being loyal to Rome and thus receiving Rome’s grain dole. Recognizing Caesar as the son of God allowed many client rulers to turn stones into bread on a regular schedule.

This story is critiquing the way that the Temple State with its rulers and priesthood had become complicit with the Roman Empire. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 to remind Luke’s listeners of the words of the Torah. In the tradition of Jewish renewal, he is calling them back to fidelity to the Torah’s teachings. Here is the passage referenced in the first temptation from Deuteronomy.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.  
(Deuteronomy 8:3)

The second temptation is a bit more obvious. What Rome promised each of its client rulers was authority and power over their region. They literally could have said to each of their clients, “I will give you authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.” If rulers of the regions that Rome conquered embraced the Roman religion of Caesar worship and swore fidelity to the Roman Empire, then authority and splendor would be theirs. In response to the way the Temple State with its golden Roman Eagle and the priest and rulers had become complicit with Rome, Jesus in the story quotes Deuteronomy again, this time chapter 6:

Worship the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you. (Deuteronomy 6:13-14)

In Luke’s third temptation (the second temptation in Matthew’s gospel), Jesus is taken up to the highest point of the Temple. Jerusalem and the Temple should not be interpreted here in merely religious terms. Think of Jerusalem as the capital of the region of Judea and the temple as the capital building. The temple was the standing symbol of the Jewish Temple state and the center out of which the Jewish Temple state operated. What Rome promised the priest, scribes, Sanhedrin, and wealthy elites of Rome was protection “lest they dash their feet upon the stone” of Rome and lose their local power and wealth. This protection was conditional upon them using the Temple State to incorporate Roman allegiance into their systems of politics, economics, and religion. (The priesthood, remember, was taken over by Roman authority, and Caesar selected the priests.). It waste temple’s complicity with Rome that both Jesus and John the Baptist critiqued: it transformed the Temple and Temple State into a channel for local Roman oppression of the economically marginalized.

In response, Jesus quotes this final time from Deuteronomy (chapter 6):

Worship the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah. (Deuteronomy 6:13-16)

What is this testing at Massah that Luke’s gospel asked its listeners to remember? It’s found in Exodus 17:

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at

*continued on page 4*



## Upcoming Events

**MARCH 15, 2025**

**Good News Fellowship**

Toronto, Ontario Canada

**For info or Zoom link, email us at:**

**info@renewedheartministries.com**

**or call: 304.520.0030**

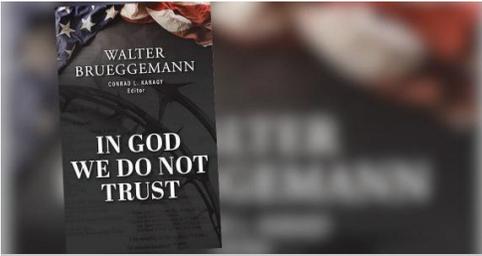
## Quotable Quotes

“A protest against injustice and violence is incomparably more valuable if it comes entirely from people who have been prompted to it purely by sentiments of humanity and a love of justice.”

– Albert Einstein  
*The World As I See It*

“It will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth’s treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal. Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope.”

– Rebecca Solnit  
*Hope in the Dark:  
Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*



## March's Recommended Reading

### *In God We Do Not Trust*

by Walter Brueggemann (Author),  
Conrad Kanagy (Editor)

This stirring series of essays by Walter Brueggemann represents the inaugural book for the new imprint, Santos Books. Who better than Walter Brueggemann to inaugurate this imprint? Sinner? Undoubtedly. Saint? By God's grace alone. Walter once told me that he is disliked by progressives because he still believes in the old formula, that it is by grace alone that we are saved. And then he confided in me, "Conrad, I have to work to stay in that place of grace." And I love that old truth. Work to stay in the place of grace. For without the work there is but cheap grace. But without the grace, the work matters not. And is ultimately, expensive work. Each of these essays in this book poignantly speak to the crisis of the current American church. Decades ago, sociologist Robert Bellah warned us of the development of civil religion in America. The merging of God and country. The legitimization of country by God. The validation of war and violence and racism and abuse and oppression in the name of Christ. While Donald Trump may represent among the worst outcomes of this combination, he thrives on its existence that has been part of our country's history since the beginning. As always, Brueggemann begins with the Bible and ends with the Bible. And if your allegiance is to other than the Bible, you will find him offensive. But if your heart has been softened by the sword that lays bare the intents and motives of our souls, you will find in these essays great comfort.

Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?" But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?" Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7)

Had those in control of society in Jesus' time returned to Egypt (now a metaphor for the Roman Empire) and the security it promised rather than trusting in the faithfulness of the God of the Torah by practicing the economic justice toward the marginalized and vulnerable found in the Pentateuch?

Although the Christian religion has now evolved far away from those early roots, the Jesus movement began as a Jewish renewal movement calling its adherents away from complicity with Roman oppression and exploitation and back to fidelity to the economic justice teachings in the Torah.

What does all of this mean for us today?

Today we are again witnessing the rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, and the weakening of and some feel the fall of democracy in our own society. It is time for Jesus followers of all types to return to the roots of saying no to a politics of exclusion, exploitation, and enrichment of the elites at the expense of the masses. What we have instead is how Egypt operated. It was also how Rome operated. It is not how Jesus envisioned God's just future.

God's just future will require willingness for Christians who bear responsibility for the mess we find ourselves in to embrace deep repentance. I also pray we become reacquainted with the Jesus of the gospels as encouragement to Christians who wisely saw the direction our society was headed and did all they could within their spheres of influence to divert our society's course. Regardless, of where you find yourself in your own journey of endeavoring to follow Jesus, may Luke's story of Jesus' temptations be a source of encouragement, conviction, and, to those for whom it applies, repentance as we enter this year's Lenten season.

## Discussion Group Questions

1. Share something that spoke to you from this week's podcast episode with your discussion group.
2. How are you being called to repent this Lenten season and resist the temptations of Empire in your own life? Share and discuss with your group.
3. What can you do this week, big or small, to continue setting in motion the work of shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone?

Thanks for checking in with us, today.

As always, you can find Renewed Heart Ministries each week on Bluesky, Facebook, Instagram and Meta's Threads. If you haven't done so already, please follow us on your chosen social media platforms for our daily posts. And if you'd like to reach us here at Renewed Heart Ministries through email, you can reach us at [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com).

Right where you are, keep living in love, choosing compassion, taking action, and working toward justice.

I love each of you dearly, I'll see you next month. ■

## SOCIAL JESUS

*A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice*



### Recent Social Jesus Blog Posts on Patheos:



#### **Moses, Elijah, Jesus and Justice**

(Part 1 of *Lessons of Justice from the Transfiguration*)

Moses and Elijah, both, are symbols of accomplished societal justice and liberation for the masses in the face of insurmountable odds.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/moses-elijah-jesus-justice/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/moses-elijah-jesus-justice/)



#### **The Narrow Path to Distributive Justice**

(Part 2 of *Lessons of Justice from the Transfiguration*)

These elements were so central to these early followers they became known as people of the “way;” the narrow way of distributive justice.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/narrow-way-justice/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/narrow-way-justice/)



#### **Transfiguration and Solidarity with the Vulnerable**

(Part 3 of *Lessons of Justice from the Transfiguration*)

Who are the Moseses and Elijahs of our day? Transfiguration challenges us to stand with the vulnerable and those being put on crosses today.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/transfiguration-solidarity-vulnerable/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/transfiguration-solidarity-vulnerable/)



#### **Insights on Turning the Other Cheek**

(Part 1 of *Insights on Turning the Other Cheek, Enemy Love, and Judging Others*)

Too often turning the other cheek is interpreted as passive non-resistance rather than the cultural pushback that it was.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/insights-on-turning-other-cheek/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/insights-on-turning-other-cheek/)



#### **Insights on Loving Our Enemies**

(Part 2 of *Insights on Turning the Other Cheek, Enemy Love, and Judging Others*)

Enemy love means both not cooperating with, resisting or obstructing violence and injustice, and also not letting go of our enemy’s humanity.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/insights-loving-your-enemies/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/insights-loving-your-enemies/)

#### **Insights on Not Judging**

(Part 3 of *Insights on Turning the Other Cheek, Enemy Love, and Judging Others*)

While we work for justice, we reject judging another human being’s worth or value as less than, regardless of who they are.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/insights-not-judging/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/insights-not-judging/)



#### **The Blessing and Cursing of the Gospel**

(Part 1 of *When Equity Evokes Rage*)

Rather than the gospel being universal good news, the first shall be last and the last shall be first sounds quite the opposite.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/blessing-cursing-gospel/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/blessing-cursing-gospel/)



#### **Lessons from Luke’s Sermon on the Plain**

(Part 2 of *When Equity Evokes Rage*)

The equity that the sermon on the plain envisions is a world where there are no more losers and survival comes through our working together.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/lessons-lukes-sermon-plain/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/lessons-lukes-sermon-plain/)

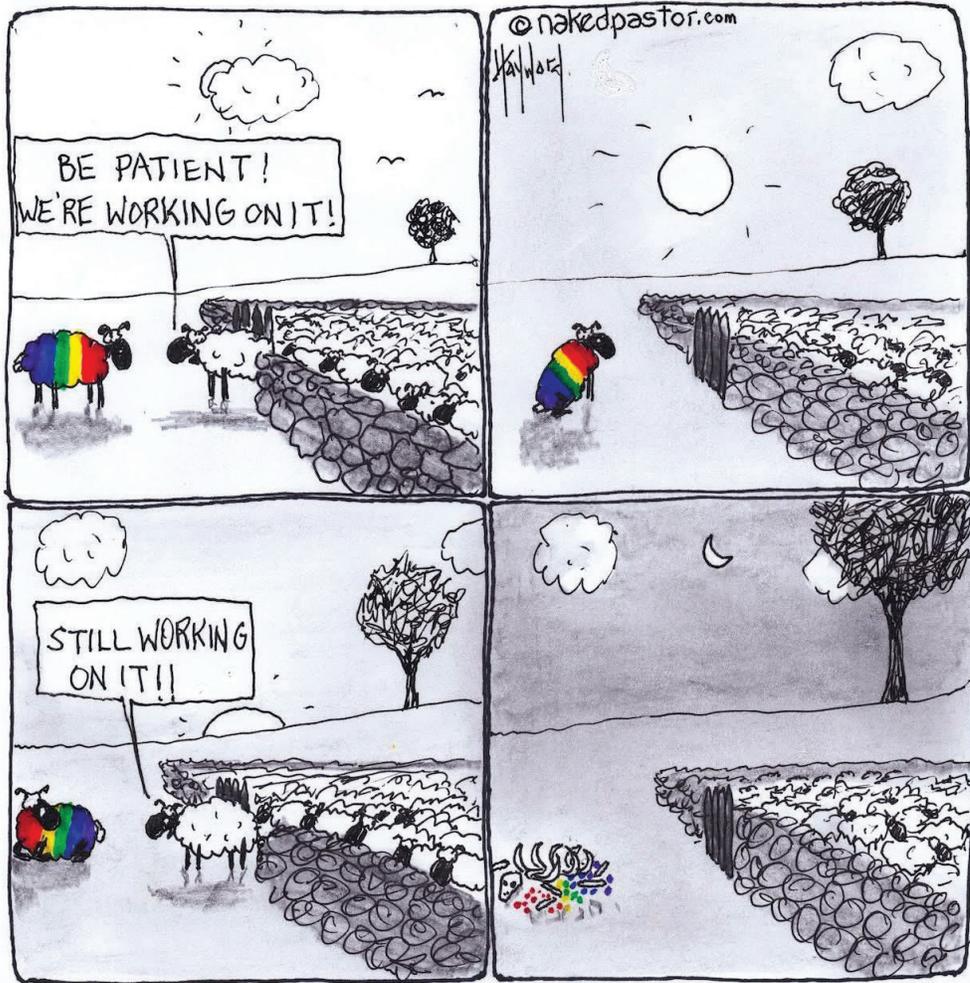


#### **A Gospel for the Underprivileged**

(Part 3 of *When Equity Evokes Rage*)

Luke’s gospel is for the underprivileged, longing for things to be put right, those present power structures are being weaponized against.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/gospel-underprivileged/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/02/gospel-underprivileged/)



**Weekly YouTube Show!**  
**Just Talking**  
 with Herb and Todd

Each week, we'll be talking about the gospel lectionary reading for the upcoming weekend. We'll be talking about each reading in the context of love, inclusion, and social justice. Our hope is that our talking will be *just* talking (as in justice) and that during our brief conversations each week you'll be inspired to also do more than just talking.

If you teach from the lectionary each week, or if you're just looking for some thoughts on the Jesus story from a more progressive perspective within the context of social justice, check it out, you might like it.

You can find the latest show on YouTube @[herbandtoddjusttalking](https://www.youtube.com/@herbandtoddjusttalking).

Please Like, Subscribe, hit the Notification button, and leave us a comment. All of this will help us get this new YouTube channel off the ground.

Thanks in advance for watching!

**What people are saying about *Just Talking* –**

*“I’m definitely enjoying these discussions. Helps clearly bring the love and teachings of Jesus into focus for me.”*

–Commenter

**ZOOM HEART GROUP**  
 GLENDALE CITY CHURCH &  
 RENEWED HEART  
 MINISTRIES

EVERY WEDNESDAY NIGHT  
 10 PM EASTERN / 7 PM PACIFIC

**Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!**

Each Wednesday evening, Glendale City Church hosts a Zoom HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in Renewed Heart Ministries weekly eSight articles and the *Jesus For Everyone* podcast published each Friday. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/ 10:00 p.m. Eastern.

To receive the link for the Zoom meeting, email us at: [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com)

The work of helping people find life-giving ways to live out their faith through love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever. At Renewed Heart Ministries, we provide resources of faith and healing with the aim of renewing hope and inspiring action as we allow the Jesus story to inform each of us as we work together to shape our world into a compassionate, just and safe home for everyone.



Renewed Heart Ministries is a 501(c)3, grassroots ministry on the margins that prioritizes the needs of marginalized communities, especially those who have been the recipients of misinformed, faith-based harm. Your support enables us to be a life-giving, healing light in our faith communities and continue to be a voice for desperately needed change.

*You get to decide what shape our faith communities take and what voices get to be heard.*

You can support Renewed Heart Ministries with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors. Your donation can be made online at: [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) or by mail at:

Renewed Heart Ministries  
PO Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901

**Whether you give \$5 or \$5,000,  
every amount helps us to continue our work.**

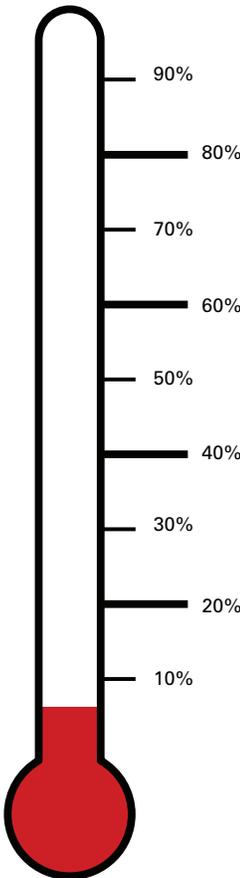
Please make sure you are receiving all of RHM's free resources by going to our website and clicking "sign up."

And **THANK YOU** for reading, listening to, sharing and supporting RHM's work. Thank you for the decisions you make every day to make our world a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone. Thank you for your dedication to engaging our world and the care you demonstrate, and for being such an important part of our community.

**2024 Projected Budget Goal:  
\$150,000.00**

---

**Donations Received as of  
end of February 2025:  
\$9,126.54**



*Thank You!*

You can find Renewed Heart Ministries on Bluesky, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Meta's Threads. If you haven't done so already, please follow us on your chosen social media platforms for our daily posts.

- [renewedheart.bsky.social](https://renewedheart.bsky.social)
- [Renewed Heart Ministries](https://www.facebook.com/RenewedHeartMinistries)
- [renewedheartministries/](https://www.instagram.com/renewedheartministries/)
- [renewedheartministries](https://www.threads.net/@renewedheartministries)
- [herbandtoddjusttalking](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-herbandtoddjusttalking)
- [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com)

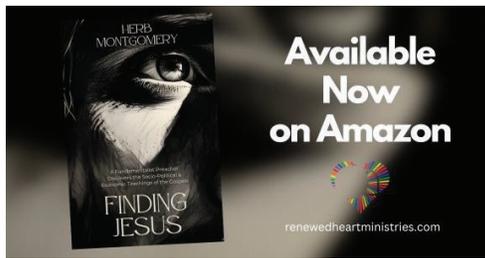


**Are you receiving all of RHM's free resources each week?**

You can find RHM on Bluesky, Facebook, Instagram and Threads for our daily posts. Our JFE podcast can be subscribed to through the podcast platform you use. You can also receive inspiration in your inbox from RHM delivered to you email inbox daily or weekly.

Go to [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) and click "Sign Up!"

*Sign up today so you don't miss a thing!*



***Finding Jesus: A Fundamentalist Preacher Discovers the Socio-Political & Economic Teachings of the Gospels***

by Herb Montgomery

**Available now on Amazon!**

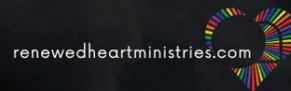
In *Finding Jesus*, author Herb Montgomery delves into the profound and often overlooked political dimensions of the gospels. Through meticulous analysis of biblical texts, historical context, and social discourse, this thought-provoking book unveils the gospels' socio-political, economic teachings as rooted in a profound concern for justice, compassion, and the well-being of the marginalized. The book navigates the intersections between faith and societal justice, presenting a compelling argument for a more socially engaged and transformative Christianity.

*Finding Jesus* is not just a scholarly exploration; it is a call to action. It challenges readers to reevaluate their understanding of Christianity's role in public life and to consider how the radical teachings of the gospels can inspire a renewed commitment to justice, equality, and compassion. This book is a must-read for those seeking a deeper understanding of the social implications of Christian faith and a blueprint for building a more just and inclusive society.



**“Fighting for the liberation of those who are oppressed is as important a responsibility of our faith as developing sound personal piety.”**

Obery M Hendricks  
**The Politics of Jesus:  
Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of  
Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been  
Corrupted**



A podcast where we talk about the intersection of faith and social justice, and what a first-century, Jewish, prophet of the poor from Galilee offers us today in our work of love, compassion and justice.



Listen & Subscribe

**You can find *The Social Jesus Podcast* on your favorite podcast platform or at: <https://the-social-jesus-podcast.simplecast.com/>**