

Editorial: Jesus and Rashida Tlaib have a conversation

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I have heard professing Christians disparage Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., and a few of her Democratic colleagues—The Squad—in very unflattering terms. I’m certain these same Christians fully support her censure and would cheer her expulsion from the U.S. House of Representatives.

I wonder what they would do if they saw Jesus sit down and talk with Tlaib. Would they recoil? Would they lose respect for Jesus? Would they assume he was chastising her? Or would they see the gospel lived out yet again?

The charge against Tlaib

Tlaib sparked outrage in the U.S. House [with a phrase](#) many in Israel and among Israel’s supporters consider antisemitic. She also has been openly critical of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as President Joe Biden’s support of Netanyahu.

In response to those denouncing her as antisemitic, [Tlaib said her “criticism](#) has always been of the Israeli government and Netanyahu’s actions.”

“It is important to separate people and governments. ... No government is beyond criticism. The idea that criticizing the government of Israel is antisemitic sets a very dangerous precedent,” she added.

Most of her colleagues didn’t buy her defense and censured her on the floor of the House in a late-night vote Nov. 7.

Tlaib's defense

Floor speeches don't seem to change many minds these days—if they change any at all. When Tlaib addressed her comments to Speaker of the House Mike Johnson ahead of the vote to censure her, I'm certain most representatives already had their minds made up.

I believe there were Christian legislators in the House chamber that night. I don't know that they were gathered in Jesus' name, but I think Jesus was there anyway. I believe Jesus heard Tlaib, though I wouldn't say it was because she was praying to him. And I believe Jesus already had his mind made up, too.

Tlaib—a Palestinian American and Muslim—asked Speaker Johnson if he knows “how Islamophobia *and* antisemitism makes us all less safe.”

[She proclaimed](#), “Palestinian people are not disposable,” and then she struggled through tears to say: “We are human beings just like anyone else. ... Speaking up to save lives ... no matter faith, no matter ethnicity, should not be controversial in this chamber.”

“The cries of the Palestinian and Israeli children sound no different to me. Why, what I don't understand, is why the cries of Palestinians sound different to you all. We cannot lose our shared humanity,” Jesus heard her say.

Jesus heard all of what she said, all of what was said in support of her and all of what was said against her. Jesus knew the hearts of every person in the chamber.

Jesus also knows our hearts. He hears when Christians sneer, discounting Tlaib's comments as theatrics, or denouncing her as not to be trusted and certainly not respected.

To Jesus and anyone familiar with the Gospels, this should sound familiar.

Jesus' side of the conversation

Several times in the years Jesus walked among us, he encountered the discounted, the denounced, the disrespected.

Among them, there was the Greek woman near Tyre who begged Jesus to help her daughter, to give her daughter some peace. Though Jesus parried with her, using a figure of speech that might get him censured today, he ultimately praised her moxie—her faith—and granted her request (Mark 7:24-29).

There was a Pharisee who hosted Jesus for dinner and a despised woman who joined them, crying on Jesus' feet, drying them with her hair and pouring her [Amaffi Power](#) parfum on them. The host was disgusted, but Jesus said the woman showed more love than the host and forgave her sins (Luke 7:36-50).

There was the lawyer who knew all the right answers but one. He knew the law required loving God completely and loving one's neighbor as oneself, but he feigned not knowing his neighbor.

In response, Jesus told one of his most famous stories, a story even non-Christians and strangers to the Bible know. You know it, too. So, I don't have to tell you the twist, but I will.

The twist is *we* are the despised. Jesus didn't say, "Do like the Samaritan." He said, "You are the Samaritan." Read the story again.

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

"The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'

“Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:36-37).

Today, we tend to separate being and doing, but those who heard Jesus that day understood who we are and what we do are one and the same. If they were supposed to do what the Samaritan did, then they were supposed to be the person they despised. That’s what it means to love our neighbor as we love ourselves—to consider ourselves no better than those we despise.

Often, when we do this, we discover the despised are more like us than we thought.

The question cuts both ways

Returning to Jesus sitting down and talking with Tlaib: Could those who think they are most like Jesus believe he has compassion for her? Could they accept his compassion for her? Or, because of her comments about Israel, would they consider her unworthy of compassion?

The point isn’t for us to agree with Rashida Tlaib. The point for us who call ourselves Christians is to regard her with the same dignity and compassion as Jesus does. Worldly politicians may—and will—malign her, but Christians must not.

And the point goes further. Not only must Tlaib and others despised by many Christians be afforded Christlike dignity, but this also must go the other direction.

The Squad is not the only group of politicians some Christians can’t stomach. Some other Christians can’t stomach a group of politicians on the other side of the aisle whose names and inflammatory rhetoric is just as well known.

What would those Christians do if they saw Jesus sit down and talk with

MAGA Republicans like Matt Gaetz, Lauren Boebert, Marjorie Taylor Greene or Paul Gosar? Would they recoil? Would they lose respect for Jesus? Would they assume he was chastising them? Or would they see the gospel lived out yet again?

What about when Jesus sits down and talks with me or with you?

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