

On Earth

as it is in Heaven



Introduction

A FOUR PART TEACHING SERIES ON JUSTICE

SCOTT HIGGINS



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Introduction for Pastors and Church Leaders

A four part teaching series on justice.

'On earth as it is in Heaven' is a resource for churches that enables an exploration of what it means to 'do justice' today.

On earth as it is in heaven provides the following components:

- **Background** - which can be used for sermon research, notes, or small group exploration of topics
- **Sermon Outlines** - to assist the preacher in constructing their sermon
- **Discussion Guide** - for small groups or larger workshops on topics
- **Prayer Card** - a fact sheet/prayer card for individual and corporate use
- **Building justice into the DNA of your church** - a tool for pastors/church leaderships to use to help their church become more justice centred.

The components can be used individually, as a package or in a variety of different combinations.

There is a series of four sermons building on each other or a one-off sermon.

Sermon 1: The world we want to see

Sermon 2: The justice of Jesus

Sermon 3: Where does the problem lie?

Sermon 4: How can we do justice?

To provide practical examples the Discussion Guide and Prayer Cards focus on four vulnerable groups in our society with connection points for churches and individuals to Baptist Care SA's current work. These can also be included in the sermons. The groups are:

- People from a refugee background
- People experiencing homelessness
- People living with mental health issues
- People exiting the prison system.

Overview of content in 'On Earth as it is in Heaven'

Justice is central to the formation of our biblical vision for our community. But what does the Bible mean when it speaks of justice? What does 'doing justice' look like for contemporary Australian Christians?

Jesus was asked by his disciples how they should pray, and he replied

'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10)

The kingdom of God was not something that would arrive in the future. It commenced and began being outworked in the life of the disciples and the early Christian church. Jesus called his followers to be a community in which everyone could experience shalom.¹

1. See page 3 of the Background document for a description of shalom.

When God delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to the promised land, they were to build a Godly community unlike the ones they had left, and unlike the nations around them. They were to be a community that valued each other and extended themselves to one another in love, compassion, mercy, grace and generosity. (From page 3 of Background).

This vision for community shaped the Old Testament approach to justice. Justice was to treat others in a fashion befitting their status as people created by God, loved by God, and beneficiaries of God's good gifts. (From page 4 of Background).

Read more on the Old Testament in Chapter 1 in the Background document and Sermon Outline: 'The world we want to see'

When Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah at the start of his ministry in Galilee he was declaring, "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15). He was bringing the news that the time had arrived for God to bring justice and peace to Israel and through Israel to the world. (From page 11 of Background).

To understand the unjust society of Jesus' times and the justice of Jesus, read more in Chapter 2 in the Background document and Sermon Outline: The Justice of Jesus

Jesus called everyone into a disciple-community that embraced the values of the kingdom of God. It was to be a community whose righteousness exceeded that of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:17-48). By this Jesus was not calling his followers to 'out-Pharisee' the Pharisees by meticulous observance of the Law. Rather, they were to practise a different type of righteousness, a righteousness of love. Such practises would see them extending themselves to one another in grace, mercy, compassion, generosity, forgiveness and love, in ways that took them beyond mere adherence to the Law. It was to be a community that eschewed power, privilege and title in exchange for welcome, servanthood and a recognition of every person's fundamental equality before God. It was to be a disciple community that extended itself beyond its current membership to everyone who was in need (e.g. Matthew 25:31-45). (From page 14 of Background).

Read more in Chapter 2 of the Background document and Sermon Outline: The Justice of Jesus

Poverty and disadvantage are created and maintained by social, political and economic systems that favour the interest of the powerful over the weak. The cover image of the 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' resource is a person overlooking a city. This is the place many of us call 'home', but it can also depict the seat of power that creates injustice.

The Christian church is called by Jesus to combat injustice by building communities that create systems that support and enable people, especially when they are in need, or encountering crisis. (From page 7 of Sermon Outlines).

Read more in Chapter 3 of the Background document and Sermon Outline: Where Does the Problem Lie?

What does 'doing justice' look like now? Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope that God would set the world to right. We see this in his ministry as he liberates people from things that oppress and bind

them (sin, Satan, poverty, disease, etc), calls those who oppress and exploit to repentance, and builds just communities. (From page 5 of Sermon Outlines).

Biblical hope is not for God to lift us out of the world in which we live, but to redeem the world in which we live. Jesus came to overturn injustice and create a world where war, poverty, oppression and violence have ceased, and his followers are called to do the same in the way we make just choices about how we live.

Read more in Chapter 4 of the Background document and Sermon Outline: How can we do justice?

The followers of Jesus are called to form communities of grace and love in which people find welcome, inclusion, hope, restoration and healing. It is such communities that Jesus suggests will bear witness to the world through their loving deeds that they love, worship and serve Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-15).

'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10)

How can we help bring heaven to earth?

Human beings are created in God's image. They are the object of God's love and the beneficiaries of God's gift of the earth and its resources. Justice demands that we treat each other in a manner that reflects this worldview. (From page 5 of Sermon Outlines).

Doing justice has a practical and everyday focus. It doesn't come into play just when we step into a court of law, nor is it simply a way of dealing with unjust social systems. Justice should be part of every relationship. It must be evident in the way we live as families, how we serve and work with colleagues, and how we live with our neighbours in ways that demonstrate respect, dignity and worth. (From page 7 of Background).

'On Earth as it is in Heaven' provides practical examples on how to do this using four vulnerable people groups within our community. These include:

- People from a refugee background
- People experiencing homelessness
- People living with mental health issues
- People exiting the prison system.

For each group there is information to gain understanding of the facts, connection points for churches and individuals to Baptist Care SA's current work with such people, and prayer points.

These examples are provided in the Discussion Guide, the Prayer Cards and the Sermon Outlines so they can be included in the messages.

In addition there are video "client clips" and written stories of Baptist Care SA's clients available on the website.

A note on language

Words can either humanise, or stigmatise and disempower a person. The language used throughout 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' has been carefully chosen so as not label a person by their current circumstance or experience. Their current situation/condition is not the person's identity nor is it their destiny. Therefore instead of saying "a homeless person", or "a mentally ill person", we say a person experiencing homelessness, or a person living with mental health issues.

Notes on using 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' components

Using the resource as a preaching guide

The material in this resource provides a preaching guide for a four-week sermon series on biblical justice.

Given every preacher has his/her own preaching style, and every church has its own culture on preaching, we have not tried to provide you with full text sermons. What you will find are Background notes, client stories and Sermon Outlines that you should feel free to use as they are or adapt in whatever fashion fits your church context.

If you plan to devote only one sermon to this theme we suggest you use the first sermon information and outline.

Using the Prayer Cards

Four different fact sheets/prayer cards are provided. One for each of the focused vulnerable people groups. If you are completing the four-week sermon series, distribute one card each week.

The front of each card provides quick facts and prayer points for that group. The reverse side shares a story of someone in the group in focus who has been supported by the work of Baptist Care SA.

Give the cards out and ask people to take them home and place them somewhere prominent so they can pray each day using the card as a prompt.

Using the Discussion Guide

You can use the Discussion Guide within a small group setting. e.g exploring what justice means for the four vulnerable groups in our community over four weeks in your small group.

Or you could use the discussion guide for a larger group workshop focusing on one of the vulnerable groups.

The guide follows the same format for each week beginning with 'your story', where group members identify their own thoughts, feelings and attitudes on the issue under examination. Use the video clip so your group can hear the story of someone living the experience ('Their Story') and consider the key statistics so you can grow your understanding of the issue and empathise with people in this group. Next look at 'God's story' which explores how the issue is viewed in Scripture, particularly in the life and teaching of Jesus. Then finally, in light of the discussion we

conclude with 'Our New Story' which challenges us all to 'do justice' in our church and in our personal lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

Small groups may wish to continue meeting for an additional week to discuss particular sets of actions their group can implement to provide ongoing support to one or more vulnerable individuals or people groups.

A just community

One of the greatest challenges for churches and individuals as they seek to become more involved in doing justice is that the issues are just so big and so many, that we feel overwhelmed. The answer is not to throw your hands up in the air and say "This is hopeless". Rather the answer is to take the first step. Find one way to build justice into your churches and your life, learn and grow, celebrate the changes that are affected, and then consider taking another step.

We can form communities of grace and love in which people find welcome, support, hope and healing. Communities of shalom. It is such communities that Jesus suggests will bear witness to the world through their loving deeds that they love, worship and serve Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-15).

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