

On Earth

as it is in Heaven



Sermon Outlines

A FOUR PART TEACHING SERIES ON JUSTICE

SCOTT HIGGINS



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Rev. Scott Higgins

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Using the Sermon Outlines

'On Earth as it is in Heaven' is a four-week series that provides your church with an opportunity to explore what it means to do justice today. It can also be used for a one-off sermon or a four sermon series.

- 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?

This document contains the Sermon Outlines. These outlines are based on the accompanying Background notes - a separate document within this resource. There are two other components in the resource, they are a small group Discussion Guide, and four Prayer Cards that provide one card to accompany each of the four sermon themes.

Preaching from 'On Earth as it is in Heaven'

Given every preacher has his/her own style and every church its own culture on preaching we have not tried to provide you with full text sermons. What you will find are background notes, stories, and sermon outlines that you should feel free to use as is or adapt in the way that suits your particular context.

If you plan to devote only one sermon to this theme we suggest you use the first sermon outline and background content for 'The world we want to see'.

Using the Application Tools

To provide practical examples the Discussion Guide and the four 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

The front of each Prayer Card provides quick facts and prayer points for the vulnerable group in our society and the reverse side shares a story of someone in the focus group who has been supported by Baptist Care. There is an invitation to join with Baptist Care in their support of people from this vulnerable group.

We suggest that you distribute one card each week during your Sunday service and invite people to take them home, place them somewhere prominent, and pray each day using the suggestions on each card.

Video Clips

For each application with each of the four vulnerable groups there are corresponding videos in the Discussion Guide and also some videos from Baptist Care SA. You may like to use these to either introduce the sermon each week or in your closing.

Presentation Slides

There is a theme based presentation graphic to use in your sermons, and in advertising the series, and the four areas of partnership ministry slide.

Connecting with the work of Baptist Care SA

The resource also contains a Baptist Care SA client scenario for each week and additional examples of ways to connect with the work of Baptist Care SA.

Sermon 1:

The World We Want to See

Sermon Outline

Big Idea

To do justice is to treat others in a way that respects and values them as people created in God's image, loved by God, and beneficiaries of the good gifts of God.

Biblical Passage

Deuteronomy 24:14-22

Introduction. Our Longing for Justice

Tell the story of Martin Luther King's letter from an Alabama jail, or use one of the videos identified in the Discussion Guide, a client story from Baptist Care SA or another story of your choosing, to highlight our longing to be treated with dignity, respect and kindness.

Suggest that while we may not always think of justice in terms of dignity, respect and kindness, that these things in fact are at the heart of a biblical approach to justice. In this sermon we will explore the biblical framing of justice in the story of Old Testament Israel.

The Shape of Biblical Justice

When we meet Israel in the book of Exodus the people are experiencing lives of ill being. They are slaves who are ruthlessly worked and brutally oppressed (Exodus 1:1-14). God hears their cry and rescues them (Exodus 3:7-10), bringing them to a land where they are to establish a new type of community, one that is everything Egypt failed to be. They had no human king, but were to honour God alone as their king. The land was divided so that every household had a share in it and mechanisms were put in place to ensure they could keep their land [you might like to illustrate this using the law of Jubilee]. The people were to treat each other, and even their farm animals, with love, kindness and respect [you might illustrate this using the Sabbath law where every person and animal was to be given a day of rest].

The Focus of Biblical Justice

This explains a particularly important feature of Old Testament justice - the emphasis upon justice for widows, orphans, resident foreigners, and the poor. [You may like to cite some of the examples provided in the background notes]. These were the people who had little power and were commonly excluded, exploited, or oppressed. They were the ones who were most likely to have their land taken, their interests ignored, and to be mistreated just as the Israelites had been

mistreated in Egypt. A just society was one which not only protected interests of its most powerful members, but protected the interests of its least powerful [You may like to use the quote by Nicholas Wolterstorff in the background notes and to provide an example of how the lowly* were to have their rights protected].

Our Opportunities for Biblical Justice

We too are called to biblical justice. This is a call to treat every person with dignity, respect and kindness and particularly to extend this to those who are least powerful and least privileged.

- Invite people to reflect on their network of relationships and identify anyone who is not being treated with the dignity and respect they deserve as somebody created, loved and valued by God. What simple action could the listener undertake to help change this?
- Invite people to reflect on who the widows and orphans of our time might be.
- Pass out copies of one of the 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' Prayer Cards [If preaching all four sermons use People from a refugee background]. Explain that the card describes a group of people who would be among the widows and orphans of our age, highlight a couple of key statistics, the work Baptist Care SA is undertaking, and then invite prayer using a prayer method suitable to your church. If you have someone in your church who can share out of their own experience in this area and for whom it will be safe to do so, you might like to ask them to share their story. Ask people to take the cards home with them, place them on their fridge or other prominent place, and every day this week to pray one of the prayer points on the card. [You may like to play one of the Baptist Care SA client videos or videos referenced in the Discussion Guide, or tell a story of a Baptist Care SA client].

* The word 'lowly' is not used in a demeaning sense, but as a description of the oppressed in a hierarchical society. See page 18 in the Background document for a full explanation of "The concepts of 'up' and 'down'".

Sermon 2:

The Justice of Jesus

Sermon Outline

Big Idea

Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope that God would set the world to right. We see this in his ministry as he liberated people from things that oppressed and bound them (sin, Satan, poverty, disease, etc.). He called those who oppressed and exploited to repent and built a community in which people were treated with the dignity, compassion and respect because they deserved this as people created by God, loved by God and beneficiaries of good gifts from God.

Biblical Passage

Luke 4:14-29

Introduction

Use the story of the Minerva sisters in the background notes, or one of the videos featured in the Discussion Guide, or a story of your own to point out that we live in a world of much injustice.

Some find it easier to look the other way and *ignore* it. Others want to just *escape* all together, wondering why God allows the injustice to go on? But God calls us *enter* in and *embody* the Justice of Jesus.

1. An Unjust World

When Jesus spoke in his hometown synagogue he spoke to a community in which every person was touched by injustice. Sketch a picture of life for those living in the time of Jesus, drawing out the types of injustice and oppression described in these notes.

2. Jesus the Justice-Bringer

Point out that the 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. The Old Testament prophets spoke of a time when justice would come to the people of Israel and to the whole world. Isaiah, which Jesus quotes, spoke of a Servant figure who would be the one through whom justice would come. Sin will be forgiven, God will be worshipped, oppression will end, the creation will be healed, and people will live in peace.

Jesus declared that "today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing", identifying himself as the Servant through whom restoration of the world will come (Luke 4:21).

Overview the 5 ways Jesus achieved this (see the Background document pages 11-14), developing one or two of the points most relevant to your church setting.

3. Becoming Justice-Bringers

- Invite people to expand their understanding of Jesus to include a Christ who brings justice to our world and calls us to join him in this. Ask them to identify one part of Jesus’s way of working towards justice and to implement that in the coming week.
- Pass out copies of one of the ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven’ Prayer Cards [If preaching all four sermons use People experiencing homelessness]. Highlight a couple of key statistics, the work Baptist Care SA is undertaking, and then invite prayer using a prayer method suitable to your church. If you have someone in your church who can share out of their own experience in this area and for whom it will be safe to do so, you might like to ask them to share their story. Ask people to take the cards home with them, place them on their fridge or other prominent place, and every day this week to pray one of the prayer points on the card. [You may like to play one of the Baptist Care SA client videos or videos referenced in the Discussion Guide, or tell a story of a Baptist Care SA client].

Sermon 3:

Where Does the Problem Lie?

Sermon Outline

Big Idea

Poverty and disadvantage are created and maintained by social, political and economic systems that favour the interest of the powerful over the weak. We are called to combat this by building communities (church and society) that create support systems people need when they encounter crisis.

Biblical Passage

James 5:1-5

Amos 2:6-8

Introduction

Invite people to reflect on how they react when they pass a homeless person begging for money. Tell Sandra's story and ask them to consider how this might change their response.

1. Who's fault is it?

When we encounter people who are disadvantaged it is easy for us to blame the victim, to attribute their situation to some failing on their part – they are lazy or lack initiative. And we can quote from the bible to back this up [share an example from the Background notes pages 16-18]. We should remember however that while it is true to say that in certain circumstances laziness will lead to disadvantage, it is not true to say that everyone who is disadvantaged is lazy. In fact, books like Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Old Testament prophets suggest that the poverty and disadvantage they saw was usually caused by the powerful exploiting the vulnerable.

2. The Problem with Power

Develop further the prophetic approach, particularly the idea that people usually fall into poverty and disadvantage when they face a life crisis but don't have the resources or support to cope. The biblical vision for community was that there would be social, political and economic systems in place to enable people to cope, but the rich and powerful stripped these away, and so brought God's condemnation on themselves.

3. Building Just Communities

The Bible calls us to create communities in which people find the support they need to cope with life's crises. This is something to which we should aspire as church communities – to be 'alternative' communities - and for which we should raise a prophetic voice in our wider communities.

Recognise some of our helping behaviour may disempower others rather than help them to discover their strengths and empower them to move forward.

1. Return to Sandra's story and invite people to consider how the church could care for Sandra and how our social/economic/political systems could be strengthened to prevent people like Sandra falling into homelessness.
2. Pass out copies of one of the On Earth as it is in Heaven prayer cards [People living with mental health issues]. Highlight a couple of key statistics if you haven't already done so, the work Baptist Care SA is undertaking working with people living with mental health issues, and then invite prayer using a prayer method suitable to your church. Ask people to take the cards home with them, place them on their fridge or other prominent place, and every day this week to pray one of the prayer points on the card.

Sermon 4:

How Can We Do Justice? Six Ways to Impact Your World

Sermon Outline

Big Idea

We can help create a more just world by being clear about our mission and taking opportunities to fulfil it.

Biblical Passage

Matthew 5:13-16

Introduction

Share the story of Desmond Tutu from the background notes or your own story of successful involvement in creating a more just world. Make the point that when we are confronted with injustice it can be overwhelming, but the reality is that through simple focussed acts of grace we can have a significant impact.

Six Ways to Be a Graceful Presence in a Post-Christian Society

Jesus called us to be salt and light in our world, to be a community that models a just and good life, and invites others to share in it.

Outline the six ways to be a Graceful Presence in a Post-Christian Society described in the background notes pages 22-25.

1. Change the world by inviting people to follow Jesus
2. Change the world by being a community of grace
3. Change the world through simple acts of kindness
4. Change the world by speaking up
5. Change the world by consuming justly
6. Change the world by partnering with others

Challenge

1. Ask people to select one or two of the six ways that they will choose to build into or strengthen in their life.
2. Pass out copies of one of the On Earth as In Heaven prayer cards [People exiting the prison system]. Highlight a couple of key statistics, the work Baptist Care SA is undertaking, and

then invite prayer using a prayer method suitable to your church. If you have someone in your church who can share out of their own experience in this area and for whom it will be safe to do so, you might like to ask them to share their story. Ask people to take the cards home with them, place them on their fridge or other prominent place, and every day this week to pray one of the prayer points on the card.

3. Display the four areas of partnership ministry slide and identify a way for people to feedback whether they have found themselves compelled to get involved, or areas they would like to see the church involved. You may use the feedback to arrange for a staff member of Baptist Care SA to meet with your leadership and/or church in general to share further and explore possibilities for partnership.



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