



Belonging Together **on Earth**

Sermon Outline

PART FIVE IN THE TEACHING SERIES ON BIBLICAL JUSTICE BY SCOTT HIGGINS...

On Earth

as it is in Heaven

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Rev. Scott Higgins

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After concluding at Baptist World Aid, Scott founded A Just Cause, a delegated body of Australian Baptist Ministries, designed to equip churches to pursue justice issues within Australia. He also initiated Converge, an annual gathering of Baptist leaders from across Australia to lobby Federal Parliamentarians on issues of justice; and served on the Boards of Micah Challenge and Stop the Traffik.

Scott lives in Newcastle with his wife Sandy and two of their three children, and is an active member of Hamilton Baptist Church.

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Introducing Belonging Together on Earth

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 realised in the life of the disciples and the early Christian church. Jesus calls his followers to be a community in which everyone is included and is valued for their unique gifts and contribution.

On Earth as it is Heaven

In 2018 Baptist Care SA, in conjunction with Baptist Churches of South Australia, produced the 'On Earth as it is Heaven' resource on Biblical Justice that focuses on how Christians can 'do justice' in contemporary Australia. On Earth provides practical examples for churches and individuals to connect with Baptist Care SA's current work with four vulnerable populations: people experiencing homelessness, people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, people living with mental health conditions, and people exiting the prison system. In 2019 we are pleased to add a fifth group for whom justice is imperative, namely people living with disabilities.

Belonging Together on Earth

Our new resource is called 'Belonging Together on Earth' and builds our biblical understanding of justice around nurturing inclusive community within churches, for people living with disability and their carers.

Disability touches almost every Australian at some point in their life. Jesus spent a lot of time ministering to people with disabilities, so it is only natural that as followers of Jesus we would also pay attention to including and supporting people with disabilities in our church communities. The 'Belonging Together on Earth' resource will help you to do this. The resource includes:

- *Background:* may be used for sermon research, or as notes for small group exploration on the topic
- *Sermon Outline:* assists the preacher to construct their sermon. It is based around the encounter between Jesus and a blind man called Bartimaeus, in the Gospel of Mark. The guide provides material to use in a sermon and describes an approach that can be used rather than an outline or full text
- *Discussion Guide:* useful for small group study or a larger workshop
- *Prayer Card:* this card can be printed out (or ask Baptist Care SA for printed copies) and distributed to every person at church/home group. Encourage people to place the card on their fridge or another place where they will see it each day, and pray one prayer point each day for the coming week
- *Additional downloadable resources:* stories, video clips and ways to connect with the ministry/work of Baptist Care SA. Visit www.baptistcaresa.org.au/belonging-together

The purpose of this resource is to help people in churches to be more aware of disability, and consider their current facilities and practices so they can find ways to be intentionally inclusive. Ideally, the sermon and the Bible study would go hand-in-hand, with a sermon either preceding or following a church-wide Bible study in groups in the midweek.

We encourage leaders to include space for the exploration of personal and church-wide practical actions. Set aside time to hear the voice of people living with disabilities in your church. Make use of additional resources and speakers available from Baptist Care SA to support your exploration and locate points of mission and ministry connection. You may choose to conduct an accessibility audit of your church building and practices relating to various disabilities, and then agree on some actions to implement going forward. You may be surprised at how easy this is and how helpful it can be, because accessibility actions are often no cost or low cost, yet they have profound impact! There are audit suggestions and accessibility guides available from the Baptist Care SA website that you can use or adapt: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections

Healing Bartimaeus

Sermon Outline

Big Idea

Bartimaeus' healing by Jesus provided him with a way to discover life free from the disabling effects of his blindness. It was a sign of the coming reign of God. So how does today's church signal the coming reign of God to people living with disabilities? Could it be through healing our communities, so they become fully inclusive?

Biblical Passage

Mark 10:46-52

Introduction

Use the statistics in the background notes to point out the prevalence of disability in society, then show the video clip of Lorn Nicholson, a blind musician and motivational speaker, sharing at a student leadership conference. See <https://youtu.be/LjNelxJPKSA>. (Time 2 1/2 minutes)

Being Bartimaeus

Read the story of the healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). Spend time expanding his situation.

- 1. Bartimaeus was known.** Unlike many people in the Gospels, he is not simply 'a blind man'. He is "Bartimaeus son of Timaeus". He is not a stranger in Jericho, but someone known, someone with a story and a history.
- 2. Bartimaeus was a beggar.** The presence of people in Israel who were poor, whether "working poor" day labourers or beggars such as Bartimaeus, was a sign that the social and economic systems of inclusion given to Israel by God in the Old Testament Law had broken down. A raft of provisions, such as the return of ancestral lands every 50 years, the obligation to provide interest free loans to those in need, to forgive loans that remained unpaid in the Sabbath year, and the simple expectation that Israelites would "love their neighbour", if implemented, would have seen Bartimaeus and his family living on their ancestral lands, enjoying the fruit of their piece of the earth, and participating actively in the life of their community. If they had temporarily lost access to their ancestral lands they would still have found provision for their needs. However, the reality for many was loss of land and lack of support.

A number of historians believe that the burden of taxes and the stresses of Roman occupation, the rapacious practises of rich Israelites, the uncertainties of life, and the burden of a growing number of poor, saw communities at the time of Jesus struggling to practise love and generosity. Therefore people with disabilities, such as Bartimaeus, were reduced to begging.

- 3. Bartimaeus was marginalised.** When Bartimaeus learns Jesus is passing by he cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” He keeps crying out in the hope that Jesus will hear him. The response of people in the crowd was to try to shut him up. In the opinion of his community, Bartimaeus was not a significant enough person to be afforded Jesus’ attention. If the shame of begging wasn’t enough, Bartimaeus is shamed further by being scolded like a child and reminded his place is at the bottom of the social ladder.

Seeing Bartimaeus

Draw out the way Bartimaeus is considered by Jesus and the crowd and the significance of Bartimaeus in the unfolding story.

1. Jesus hears Bartimaeus calling, stops his journey and asks for the man to be brought to him. When he meets Bartimaeus he does not scold him or deride him, but gives him his full and complete attention. **He does not assume what Bartimaeus wants; Jesus asks him.**^a

One of the things people with disabilities often experience is a loss of agency. People frequently assume they know what a person with disability needs and set about doing it, or securing it for them. Sometimes a sense of discomfort at watching a person with disability take time and effort to accomplish a task that others can complete quickly, makes people do it for a person with a disability. Although well-intentioned, that person may experience this as disempowering.

The fact that Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants exhibits a profound respect for Bartimaeus. Perhaps for the first time in his life, Bartimaeus is addressed as a person, a citizen of Israel, and a man of faith, rather than a beggar at the bottom of the social ladder.

2. In Mark’s Gospel, this story is set against the backdrop of Jesus heading towards Jerusalem to establish the reign of God. Imagining that the arrival of God’s new reign is imminent, we meet people seeking to secure their place in it. A rich man approaches Jesus wanting to know what he must do to have a place in the kingdom (Mark 10:17-25). Unfortunately, to grow rich in ancient Israel meant acquiring large estates by gobbling up the ancestral lands of people just like Bartimaeus! Jesus indicates that if the rich man is to be part of the kingdom, he needs to relinquish his wealth and return those lands to the people that so desperately need them. However, his greed prevents him from committing to such an action.

This episode is followed by competition between Jesus’ disciples for the positions of greatest honour, prestige and power when the kingdom comes. (Mark 10:35-45)

In contrast, the story of Bartimaeus is one of model discipleship. Bartimaeus recognised Jesus as the one bringing in the reign of God. His request aligns with the kingdom Jesus came to bring on earth, and once Bartimaeus is healed he begins to follow Jesus.

a. For more information on this important point of being inclusive, see Baptist Care SA, *‘Guide 2: Intentional inclusion’* where Sara mentions she doesn’t want people to pray for a healing miracle for her instead pray for her to be part of an inclusive community, <https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2_Intentional-Inclusion_WEB.pdf>. Found via www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections. Also see videos via www.baptistcaresa.org.au/belonging-together

Healing Bartimaeus

Draw out the point that in the Gospels, healing is a sign that God's kingdom has arrived in the ministry of Jesus. It is a foretaste of the life of the future, of the time when death, decay and suffering are finally and fully overthrown; bodies, minds, relationships, and even the creation itself will be set right forever.

We too hope for that day. We pray to taste it even now in God's work of healing our hearts, relationships and bodies. Yet we also recognise that God's grace and kingdom presence is seen in the formation of character and the wisdom gained as we struggle with the vagaries and challenges of life.

Healing Our Communities

The story of Bartimaeus is a potent example of the fact that the challenge for people with disabilities is often not their disability as much as it is the way people respond to them.

1. If people such as the rich man had returned the ancestral lands they had stolen, and the wider community had practised the neighbourly love expected of them in the Law, Bartimaeus may never have been by the roadside calling out for Jesus! He may well have been living with his family enjoying the productivity of his ancestral land that God had given his family.
2. If the disciples and the crowds had recognised that community was about serving not being served, Bartimaeus may never have been by the roadside calling out for Jesus. He would have been integrated into a community of faith, committed to ensuring every member's gifts were valued and utilised and where every person was treated with dignity, respect, grace, love and generosity.

For application draw out the point in the background notes that disability is not the impairment, but the disabling impact of the impairment that occurs via the interactions the person has with their community. Offer suggestions as to how your congregation can move forward with inclusion, especially for people living with disabilities. It would be helpful to invite a person with the lived experience of disability or caring for someone with a disability to share their experience.

Audit

Consider completing an accessibility audit of your church. This goes beyond accessibility to the building. You can find examples on the [Connections Resources](#) on the Baptist Care SA website. You may share the results of the facility audit in this package and consider how accessible and inclusive your ministry programs are to people living with various disabilities (hearing, sight, sensory, physical, intellectual, psychosocial, head injury).^b

You may like to invite people to join a working group to explore the issue further and report back to the church on ways forward. You may be surprised at how simple some of the solutions are!

b. For more information see Baptist Care SA, '[Inclusion Guide 3: Accessible church](#)'. The guide covers the benefits of having accessible church beyond inclusion of people with disabilities. It has tips on accessibility and links to audit tools, <https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/3_Accessible-Church_WEB.pdf>. It is found with additional auditing tools via www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections

On Earth as it is in Heaven

In 2018 Baptist Care SA in conjunction with Baptist Churches of South Australia produced the 'On Earth as it is Heaven' resource on Biblical justice which considers the ways Christians can 'do justice' in contemporary Australia. It explores what the Bible says about justice and the way Jesus teaches his followers to live a just life.

'Human beings are created in God's image, are the object of God's great love, and the beneficiaries of God's great gift of the earth and its resources. Justice demands that we treat each other in a manner befitting this.'

The Teaching Series includes the following downloadable components:

- Introduction
- Background Document
- Sermon Outlines
- Discussion Guide
- Prayer Cards
- Justice Survey Tool – for pastors/church leadership to use to help their church become more justice centred

The [On Earth as it is Heaven](#) resource components can be used individually, as a package or in a variety of combinations.

There is a series of 4 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?

'On Earth as it is Heaven' provides practical examples for churches and individuals to connect with Baptist Care SA's current work with four vulnerable populations. The Discussion Guide and Prayer Cards focus on these four groups, and client clips and stories are provided for inclusion in sermons. The groups are:

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

***Prayer Cards**

Printed copies of the cards are available FREE of charge from Baptist Care SA. If you are intending to use these in your church or small groups, please contact us and we'll supply as many copies as you need. Contact our Church Support Team via churchsupport-team@baptistcaresa.org.au to receive your copies.

For more information about 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' visit www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth

Connections Resources for inclusive church communities

Our communities are not to be places where we merely share space, but they are to be places where we proactively work for one another's welfare.

Inclusion is not about creating more programs, it is about the culture of our churches reflected in the language we use, accessibility of our churches, and creating opportunities for full participation of everyone so we can all contribute and grow our gifts.

As part of the Connections project, Baptist Care SA held focus groups and had a steering group for the project of people with lived experience of disability and carers who co-designed the content and provided photos for the 10 practical guides for inclusion. These guides use the voices of people living with disability to provide their top tips for inclusion, providing information, personal stories and examples that work for local churches.

1. **Disability awareness:** Care for others
2. **Intentional inclusion:** We are better together
3. **Accessible church:** Disability is not the issue, accessibility is
4. **Effective communication:** Relationships start with communication
5. **Creating support:** Look out for one another's interests
6. **Carers' perspective:** Welcome and understanding
7. **Managing challenging behaviour:** Working together to find a solution
8. **Connected community:** Promote your activities
9. **Autism-friendly church:** Engage, affirm, challenge
10. **A theology of belonging:** 'All one in Christ Jesus'.

The [Connections Resource](#) page contains additional resources referred to in the guides covering:

- Websites resourcing inclusive communities
- Resources for churches
- Audit tools for inclusive communities
- Communication resources
- Transport in South Australia
- Carers support
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Autism friendly church

For more information about the Connections Resource visit www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections



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