

Sunday 14 October 2007 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Renovation of the Heart Sermon Series Week 3 – Harvest Sunday : Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly

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Intro

Harvest theme – chance to reflect on the material blessings we have in life – simply by being living in Britain today. And out of our thankfulness, to choose to give generously. ‘Freely you have received, freely give.’ (Matt 10:8) Continuing our Autumn series on the Renovation of the Heart - Cultivating the Character of Christ – focus today on what our hearts, characters, and therefore lifestyles should be like in relation to the poor, vulnerable, marginalised around us. Using the basis of the Micah Challenge – a global Christian movement to fight poverty, and to campaign on behalf of the poor. (leaflets etc)

Holiness isn't scary

When we talk of ‘holiness’, or ‘integrity’, we have images in our minds perhaps of being ‘super spiritual’ – but really it’s much broader than this. Holiness is being like God. A holy lifestyle – is a lifestyle like God, acting in line with God’s will & heart. So as today we focus on God’s heart for the poor, a holy lifestyle – in line with God’s heart – suddenly becomes really practical as well as spiritual

Cultivating the Character of Christ

Jesus was known – in his time, and even today around the world – for His compassion towards the poor, marginalised, outcast. Christianity itself is known for being counter-cultural in this sense – reaching out to the poor and vulnerable, without hope of return (eg. Barnardos, growth of hospitals, Mother Theresa, Jubilee 2000 campaign)

And Jesus was simply reflecting the heart of his Father in reaching out, and in deliberately overlooking the social conventions that say the poor almost deserve to be overlooked etc

There’s something you really can’t fail to miss in scripture: The poor really matter to God!

- So they need to matter to you and me
- Its all the way through the bible
 - from the laws of Moses making special provision for the poor, the widow, the orphans, the alien in the land (Exodus 22:21-23)
 - the proverbs, the psalms
 - to Jesus’ own actions to those at the bottom of the social heap
 - and the early church’s concern for the poor (Gal 2:10) and the gentile aliens (James 1:27)

SO – we want to be like Jesus – take on his character – a massive part of which was compassion, open-hearted approach to people whatever their circumstances. What sort of characteristics did Jesus have?

- Not judgemental
 - Looked past circumstances to the person (made in the image of God) within
- Justice
 - In the sense of wanting each human to reach their potential – which is knowing God and seeing his Kingdom come, whatever their outward circumstances in life
- Mercy
 - Cared for the one (made time, stopped, welcomed)
- Humble
 - His own lifestyle – itinerant, very few possessions, decried fame & fortune and denounced even major donors as hypocrites for their attitudes/showing off

Summarised as: **Micah 6:8**

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Justice

Micah 3:9-12

9 Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob,
you rulers of the house of Israel,
who despise justice
and distort all that is right;

10 who build Zion with bloodshed,
and Jerusalem with wickedness.

11 Her leaders judge for a bribe,
her priests teach for a price,
and her prophets tell fortunes for money.
Yet they lean upon the LORD and say,
"Is not the LORD among us?
No disaster will come upon us."

12 Therefore because of you,
Zion will be plowed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,
the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.

What is the biblical meaning of justice?

- Fairness (God judges the heart of man eg. Jeremiah 11:20, 1 Corinthians 4:5)
- A new start (eg. Jubilee)
- Reaching your potential in life
 - Trying to encourage, inspire people in the Inner city
 - If you're a teacher/educator for example you are helping people to reach their potential – that's promoting justice too.
 - Instead of focusing on ourselves, our call, our walk with God
 - Sometime's ask yourself the question – what is *this person called to be*
- The gospel (good news to all, regardless of social or material state)
- Will come eventually
 - God is just, he will judge the living and dead one day and restore good relationship to the whole earth

Injustice: What is it today?

- Where greed wins over circumstance
 - eg. the rich/powerful favouring each other for the sake of gain/profit)
 - Church leaders favouring those with money
- Denying people their 'rights' & opportunities
- Rich & wealth without addressing the poor & poverty (City, Country, Continent levels)
- Injustice is found where the gospel is not. The gospel is very much social good news

DISCUSS IN GROUPS:

How can I 'act justly' in my life

Love mercy

Reading: Woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11)

Mercy extends second chances.

That's what Jesus embodies – when the legal penalty was death by stoning for adultery, he shows mercy, provokes others to act humbly (recognising their own failings) and refuses to judge the woman.

Luke 4:14-21 was Jesus' Mission statement - preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour) and it presents us a challenge - to follow Jesus in His example in bringing in the characteristics of His Kingdom today

Our response to the gospel should not be separated from social action. Yes, its heart and spiritual. But its absolutely hands & practical. Social action to promote justice and mercy is part of what it means to see God's kingdom come on earth. So mission is much more than evangelism - Its service, love, and sharing the good news – with words when helpful.

The attitude: 'Soft heart and hard feet' (Nicky Gumble)

DISCUSS IN GROUPS:

In what practical ways did Jesus show mercy this in His ministry? What can we do today?

Walk humbly with your God

Humility: living a life that reflects a greater power

Like the sermon last week – letting God be God in our hearts and lives. Which means, that we can't play God, can't try to stay in control, can't act like the world revolves around us.

We are in a fortunate position – among the world wealthiest 5%. A bounty of opportunities at our feet – education, fantastic healthcare system, low crime, very low rates of corruption compared even to other European countries, a police force you trust (in Brazil, people walk away from the police because they are afraid).....

Whole chapter of Matthew 25 is about this - *living a life that reflects a greater power*

- **parable of the 10 virgins** – about living a life of readiness for God to move. Not being found asleep on the job
- **parable of the Sheep & the Goats** – about Jesus' expectations that we put aside our own agendas regularly, and do deeds of practical help and hospitality to those around us, because by doing so, we are serving Jesus himself
- **parable of the talents** - is about God's people who are entrusted with property & money – in other words, the resources to make a difference in this world and how we are expected to be good stewards, making proper use of those resources – to further God's kingdom

In a similar passage in Luke's gospel, Jesus summarises like this:

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Luke 12:48)

Are you and I *living a lifestyle that reflects the fact that we are not the centre of the universe?*

How are we using the resources we have at our disposal?

- Environmental & social? Education? Political? Monetary? Time?

DISCUSS IN GROUPS:

What does it mean for me to “walk humbly with my God?”

NOTE TO YOUTH, YOUNG ADULTS & STUDENTS:

Don't think that you can't do anything about this stuff now, simply because you are young, or relatively poor yourselves

- Don't think that if you wait 10 years – when you have more time perhaps, more money, more influence in the world
- Don't think that you'll suddenly 'get God's heart' then
 - In fact – its harder to change your ways and your outlook by then
- You can all make serious differences by the way you live, with what it is that you have now
- Cultivate a heart for justice, mercy and humility – a heart for the poor NOW
 - That way, you'll be in a better place to survive the onslaught of wealth, careers, family, big cars, more opportunities that come as you get older

Recommended books

- [Money, Sex and Power](#) by Richard Foster
- [Good News about Injustice](#) by Gary Haughen
- [Justice in the Burbs](#): Being the hands of Jesus wherever you live by Will & Lisa Samson

Conclusion

As followers of Jesus, we are committed to following his ways, taking on his characteristics. And as we become more like him on the inside, so our outer behaviour changes in response. In this world of a rich and poor divide, do I share in my heart the same attitudes that Jesus had on earth – a compassion towards the poor, marginalised, outcast?

How can I use the resources God has given me to bring in characteristics of His Kingdom, here & now?

HOW DO I CHANGE MY INNER HEART?

The power of the HS in us

- Just before J proclaims his mission statement of 'good news to the poor'
 - Luke 4:14 "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside."
- Micah – with the courage to speak out at the Jew's injustice (espec amongst their elite)
 - Micah 3:8 "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin."
- So we need to be challenged, changed, empowered by the Holy Spirit too
 - Make space this day, this week to let God impart his own heart to you

HOW CAN I CHANGE MY OUTER BEHAVIOUR?

We can over-complicate our faith, but we must come back to Micah's words. Our faith is simple: To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

I encourage you to think and pray carefully about your lifestyle, in light of these simple guidelines. And take another practical step, even this week, towards living it out all-the-more

- Give money
- Take action
- Pray
- Start small, but start!

When justice, mercy and humility embrace, we are the recipients of life-giving and life-transforming gifts from God. When we have the privilege of extending justice, mercy and humility to others, we are gifts from God in their lives