



Micah 6:6-15

TITLE

Last week we looked at the way by which we could bring the values of heaven to earth as we live as the people of God as an outpost of heaven. We found out that as Christians, as people who live according to God's word, that our actions and attitudes should stand in stark contrast to the values of society. Nowhere is this more true than in issues of poverty. The Old Testament has a large number of statements that we had read to us this morning. Let me give you another one from the book of Proverbs; some of the wise words of a guy named King Lemuel.

VERSE

Prov 31:8 "Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. 9 Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy."

It's a repeating theme in the OT. It's not a political statement, it's the word of God. When we see the poor, the needy, the oppressed we do something about it – particularly as we live in the sort of country where every citizen actually CAN do something.

Last week we explored some aspects of social justice in the UK and saw one of the main problems when we consider these issues is that it is necessary to speak truth as what often is published in the press in particular just isn't true.

However, when we look outside of the UK, the issue of poverty is even more tragic.

PICTURES

We've all seen pictures like this. They are very emotional pictures. I'd like to think that these were pictures of the past – the one on the bottom left is a well known one from about 30 years ago. The rest are contemporary. I've got to say that in the last 30 years or so things have got so much better than they were but we are still faced with this distressing truth.

1 IN 8 GO TO BED HUNGRY

Problems of starvation still exist. It may have dropped, but still 1 in 8 people receive insufficient nutrition in a day to support them – they go to bed hungry. The other sad fact is that:

THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD FOR EVERYONE

30 years ago we couldn't have really said that. We can now. In fact, in some developed countries like ours, crops are now grown for industrial purposes like bio fuel rather than food.

So why do people starve? Because of inequalities of trade, because people destroy crops to maximise profit, because of waste, because of war, because people don't earn enough to buy food, because of corruption.

To be fair, one of the unanimous policies of all our major political parties has been to maintain our overseas aid commitment despite cuts. In other western countries this has

not been the case. I've heard many people say; why should the UK Government be giving the same overseas when we are all getting cuts at home? Surely they need to deal with their problems of corruption and poor government? PICS AGAIN I think the pictures I just showed may answer that one. What we describe as poverty in this country is ostentation in many places in the world. It shouldn't make us ignore poverty in our land, but make us desire all the more to see justice and compassion in some of the most troubled places on earth.

Besides, charity, they say, begins at home and whereas many of the hungriest countries are the most troubled on earth, some of the problems of world hunger are caused by inequalities, corruption and greed in developed countries – countries like ours. It's a matter of taking our responsibilities as a nation seriously. The problem of food inequality starts here and it's no good the richest countries criticising poor countries for corruption when it is rife here.

IF SLIDE

The UK chaired the recent G8 summit of the world's richest countries. Christian charities joined together with secular charities with a campaign called IF which encouraged the governments to remove the barriers in the richest countries to food being more equally distributed.

Aid

Give aid to stop children dying from hunger. Help the poorest have enough food to live.

Land

Stop poor farmers being forced off their land. Grow crops to provide food, not fuel.

Tax

Stop companies dodging taxes in poor countries so millions can be freed from hunger.

Transparency

Governments and companies must be honest about their role in the food system.

Climate change

Western countries which consume most energy must take more responsibility for dealing with the effects the climate change this brings in the poorest countries.

The G8 summit was dominated by the Syria crisis but there was a lot of prayer and campaigning with Christians, particularly Tearfund, taking a prominent role.

So what happened. Tearfund reports that it was a *A step in the right direction*.

“On tax dodging, the commitment to **start exchanging tax information automatically** for both rich and poor countries - so it's not secret any more - is great, but we need a clear time line for when it will happen.

Land grabs were on the G8's agenda for the first time, which was good, and some useful partnerships were agreed, but far more is needed.

They committed to keep the **promise of \$100 billion a year to help poor countries adapt to climate change**, but again failed to say where it'll come from.

Yesterday, thanks to you, the G8 has announced that all developing countries should have

the information they need to **clamp down on tax dodging**.

Their tax agreement is a step in the right direction - but there's still more work to be done."

Christians up and down the country have been involved with this and I'd commend it to you also. I'm afraid we're on board a bit late but there's still much to be done as I've just said.

SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE INVOLVED?

But why should Christians be involved with this at all? Surely this is a bit political isn't it? Should we be involved in this? Indeed I was brought up in an environment where it was common for evangelicals to say that we are here to worship, to share the gospel and serve the Lord, not be involved in the world's issues. The whole idea of the social gospel seems good but that isn't our agenda.

The Bible doesn't bear that approach out. The prophet Micah pointed this out. He prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel around the time of Ahab (874-852 BC). Ahab's rule was evil. He tolerated and promoted idolatry, and what Judaism there was what the northern version where worship was not in Jerusalem but at shrines at Bethel and Dan. They had transformed the worship of God into just a set of rituals which had been horrifyingly perverted:

VERSE

6 What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? 7 Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.

They had lost focus. Their worship was all about themselves, even being prepared to sacrifice their own child (something that was just seriously wrong) in order to please the Lord. Horrific. But we see here the relationship they were called to: *What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.*

Quite typically, we are called to both fellowship with God and to healthy relationships with others. It's the message of the Old and New Testaments.

VERSE

Our worship has never sunk to the horrors of Bethel and Dan, but too often modern worship can service can be all about me and not about Jesus and about others. This is the challenge of Micah. The people were doing OK, feeling blessed, yet tolerated the injustice, cheating and lies of their society – and participated in them: *In the houses of evil people are treasures which they got dishonestly. They use false measures, a thing that I hate. 11 How can I forgive those who use false scales and weights? 12 Your rich people exploit the poor, and all of you are liars.*

As we read, the consequences for the nation were awful. Our responsibility as the Lord's people – and central to our confession of the gospel – is to use what ability we have to in order to *"Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. 9 Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy."*

SHEPPARD

Once the Bishop of Liverpool and former England cricketer David Sheppard said that the Bible had a bias to the poor. He was very much engaged in campaigning for the poor in

Liverpool and elsewhere. Actually God isn't so much biased to the poor, but stands for righteousness and justice, love and compassion. If the world had all these things then there wouldn't be poverty.

But we live in a sinful world and as God's people we stand for what he stands for, righteousness and justice, love and compassion. If we are outposts of heaven then we should reflect all these and use the ability we have to do something about it. So what can we do?

Pray - we can all do this. Get the information form Tearfund and others and pray. Join with us as we pray for this situation.

Give - many of us already do this. Even though giving to charitable organisations has fallen in recent years, we come from a generous nation. We can still make a difference, one person at a time if necessary..

Act – we live in a free country where we can express our views to our leaders. Take opportunities to do so because Christians were persecuted and died to gain us that right over the centuries. The IF marches in various places before the G8 Summit were different from past demonstrations – they were peaceful and they made the news because of it! Our views do count and the internet allows us to make our voice heard on behalf of those who can't speak in a way that hasn't happened before. I don't have Tearfund's cards with me today but you can register online. We can make a difference.

So a practical set of measures we can do. Better still, it gives Christians an opportunity to speak and interact with others about why we *Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. 9 Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy.*" Because we have a God who while we were helpless and hopeless, sent His won Son into the world in order to die for us so that we may find forgiveness, life and hope.

So let's show His love and compassion to others!

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 30/6/13
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