



Being Good News for Our Community - Spring 2017

Study 5 - Do Look After the Vulnerable



Deuteronomy 24:10-22; Luke 14:7-14

(sermons on Feb 19th)

Introduction

This series is about Being Good News for Our Community; the first few studies were about the sort of people we need to be – both as individuals and in relation to each other – if we are going to have a positive impact on the different communities of which we are part. Now we go on to particular ways in which we, corporately as well as individually, can be a blessing to those around us.

In most of the Old Testament, God's people were a whole society, so there is teaching about how to arrange society justly and care for the vulnerable. We can't apply the rules directly to our society but they suggest important principles for us to relate to life today. Jesus challenged the people as to whether they were living up to God's ideals. In the early church, Christians were a small minority in each area, so they had less influence on how society was run, so there is more teaching about personal ethics.

Deuteronomy 24:10-15 Looking after the Financially Vulnerable

v.10 what he is offering as a pledge – security for the loan, which might be his only coat (see v.13). Jews were not allowed to charge interest to fellow-Jews but could take security.

v.14 an alien – someone who is not a Jew. Although God has chosen and loves his people (Deut 7:7-8), he is still concerned about justice and mercy for all nations.

v.15 he is counting on it – to buy food for his family for that day

1. What is the point of the rules about not going into someone's house (v.10) and returning some items that have been pledged to secure a loan (v.13)?

Where in our society is the dignity of poorer people undermined? What is the equivalent of holding onto someone's only coat to secure a loan?

2. Why was it important to pay wages on time in those days? How might we be tempted to take advantage of people in a similar way today? How can the church influence fair pay and fair work?

3. What can we do as a church to care for the financially vulnerable, either directly or by influencing those who have financial power today?

Deuteronomy 24:16 Looking after the Legally Vulnerable

v.16 each is to die for his own sin – more crimes were punished by death, partly because there were no prisons, except in big cities, and few people would be able to pay fines.

4. How are family members and neighbours affected by the punishment of criminals? What is our attitude to the prison system? What is being done locally to help people to reform their lives?

Deuteronomy 24:17-22 Looking after Vulnerable Social Groups

5. Why were 'the alien, the fatherless and the widow' particularly vulnerable in Old Testament times?

Which groups in our community are struggling to cope, or are on the edge of society?

What might be the equivalent today of overlooking a sheaf, or leaving some fruit on a tree? How can we provide for those in need whilst preserving their sense of worth, and giving them the opportunity to contribute to, and to share, in the comparative prosperity of our society?

6. *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt.* (v.18, 22) How should our own experience of God's grace and mercy affect the way we treat people who have encountered difficulties in their lives?

Luke 14:7-14 Parables about Parties

v.12 *do not invite your friends – this parable is not so much Jesus teaching about party etiquette as about Jesus challenging the idea that we need only to be generous to those who can pay us back*

v.14 *you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous – the Jews of Jesus' time believed that only those who were righteous would be raised from the dead to enjoy life in God's eternal kingdom; Jesus sees this time as not only a time of judgement but also of commendation for those who have lived in the way that God approves.*

7. What does Jesus' parable about taking places at a feast (vv.7-11) teach us about our attitude to people who appear to be less well-off, or to enjoy a lower status, than ourselves?

8. How *in practice* can we 'invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind' to the party of life in the kingdom? Which groups in our local communities would this involve?

Being Good News to the Vulnerable

Are we as Christians, or in the way the church operates, ever *bad* news to the vulnerable?

What are we *already* doing in Trull and Angersleigh to be *good* news to the vulnerable in our area?

Can you suggest one or two new ways, however small or tentative, that we could be good news locally?

How can we be good news to the vulnerable *beyond* Trull and Angersleigh, even beyond Taunton?