

'THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP' – 2010 LENT NOTES FROM THE LEPROSY MISSION

WEEK THREE - SPEAKING UP FOR THOSE WITHOUT A VOICE

Bible Passage: Proverbs 31: 8 & 9

These words were spoken many centuries ago yet still bring a challenge to the world of today. Proverbs is a book of wise sayings – of how to apply divine wisdom to daily life.



DISCUSS:

Who are those who cannot speak for themselves today?

Here are some suggestions. Can the group come up with other suggestions?

Victims of injustice

Children

Refugees

Those facing the stigma of diseases such as leprosy and HIV/AIDS

Bible passage: Deuteronomy 24: 17-22.

This passage was a reminder to the people of God that they should give thanks for their harvest; for the good things the Lord had done for them and also their responsibility to those who had so little. Deuteronomy talks of 'orphans, widows and foreigners' – these were people who at that time were often marginalised and faced discrimination. God's people were to show compassion, hospitality and generosity. As the people brought the first fruits of the harvest, (i.e. their best) to God, provision was also to be made for the poor and needy (see verses 19 and 20). This is also linked with the practice of 'gleaning' which is part of the story of Ruth.

Gleaning was (and still is in some parts of the world) the practice whereby farmers allow people to pick up the leftovers after a crop has been harvested. In the ancient world, this was a sort of welfare system.

There are people today who have no voice, who are marginalised for one reason or another. They need people to speak up for them and stand alongside them.

Some facts and figures about today's world

- 5.8% of children die in the developing world before the age of 5
- Many of the poor in the developing world live on less than \$1 a day (approx 62 pence per day)
- The lack of clean drinking water is one of the biggest problems the poor face today
- City dwellers in Africa use approx. 50 litres of water, per person per day. In the West, we use 215 litres per person day
- In the developing world, 1.8 million die each year due to diarrhoea and a further 1.2 million from malaria (closely linked with stagnant, dirty water)
- 2.6 billion people (42%) of the world's population have no access to good sanitation
- 4,500 children die each day from water-related diseases
- 1 in 6 do not have access to clean drinking water
- Leprosy is closely linked with poverty
- Every 2 minutes someone is diagnosed with leprosy
- Leprosy is the seventh most common cause of blindness

- Many with leprosy suffer from discrimination and prejudice and are still regarded as outcasts

PRAY:

It may be an opportunity at this point to reflect upon God's provision to us and to give thanks for his blessings (or perhaps sing a song or listen to some music). Prayers for the world, the sick, the needy can be said at this point. Silent prayer and reflection, open prayer, or using the prayer below (with the collective response in bold type) are all options.

Show us the way O Lord

We live in an age of constant information about the needs of the world – 24-hour news, the internet, television programmes, literature and information coming through our letterboxes. We are tempted to feel overwhelmed and discard all of this as junk mail and yet, it is fellow human beings we are considering. People we shall never meet; people who live a totally different lifestyle to us; people who live in abject poverty. Their needs often seem so remote from ours as we are blessed with the basics of life and much more besides. What should we do Lord? Feel guilty about our lifestyle and lack of response at times? Bury our heads in the sand and say it is not our concern? Make drastic cuts in our standard of living?

Show us the way O Lord

We give thanks for your many blessings, enabling us to take care of our families and also to care for others. Give us a heart for those in need and help us to balance our needs with those of others. We live in a divided world but we know that your love can heal those divisions and draw us closer together. Help us to use our time, talents and resources to reach out to those in need, recognising that all we have is from you. Make us good stewards of all you provide so that your blessings may abound across the world.

Show us the way O Lord

Amen



DISCUSS:

Should issues such as poverty and injustice be the responsibility and concern of governments and not the Church?

Many would say that the answer to the above question is yes. Governments have a responsibility towards all of their people and they should be concerned about injustice and poverty. However, should this governmental responsibility extend to others around the world?



DISCUSS:

What can governments work at individually and collectively to ensure that they tackle such issues as poverty and injustice?

Suggestions could well be setting up agencies to tackle poverty, reducing global debt, fair-trade, favourable trading schemes for poorer countries, declarations of human rights, raising awareness of issues of injustice, campaigns (sanctions?) against those countries where there is an abuse of human rights. Some people may want to discuss the whole concept of human rights. Are there basic human rights which apply to everyone – the right to clean water, food, medical care, a fair trial and so on?



DISCUSS:

Does the Church have any role to play in dealing with such issues as poverty and injustice?

One thing that emerges from Scripture is that God's people are to be a voice of conscience for kings and rulers and can also be involved in showing God's compassion and care to others. In the Old Testament (particularly the words of the 8th century prophets such as Amos, Micah, Hosea) there was condemnation of the evils of the day.

Bible passages:

Amos 8: 4 - 7 What 'wrongs' are listed here?

Micah 6: 8 What does the Lord require of us?

Proverbs 31 What action should we take?

The ministry of Jesus was a testimony to God's care and concern for the outcast. Can the group give examples of this from the Gospels?

Acts 2: 42-47

Acts 4: 32-37 What provision did the early church make for those in need?

Christians have always been involved in working for social justice and change. Can the group think of people, past or present, who have worked to bring about change in society?

We cannot bury our heads in the sand and pretend that such injustices do not exist or that someone else will take care of it.

What could our response be?

Firstly, we need to recognise that there may be situations where we do not have the expertise or knowledge to be involved. To do things without proper advice, consideration and prayer could have disastrous consequences.

Having said that, there are a number of things we can do.

- Pray

Do we believe that praying for issues involving justice and poverty will make a difference? The world may be sceptical about prayer but are we?

- Support campaigns and organisations who work to fight poverty and injustice

Think about the impact the Make Poverty History campaign had, or the campaign to reduce the developing world's debt. Many churches and organisations (including The Leprosy Mission) are part of the Micah Challenge whose objectives are based on the previously read verse from **Micah 6**.

Many countries in the world have laws which discriminate against those who are considered to be outcasts. In certain states in India it is still legal to state as a just cause for divorce the fact that your husband or wife is suffering from leprosy. The Leprosy Mission is working hard to advocate for the rights of those who live on the margins of society.

People can briefly say which organisations they do support and why. If The Leprosy Mission is one of those, why do people support this work? If it is not; are there any particular reasons why or is simply because there are so many worthy causes in the world that people have to make choices?

There are approx. 190,000 registered charities in the UK who have a combined income of £46 billion. 1% of these charities are classed as 'large' charities, ie., those with an annual income of over £5 million. Many of these charities are household names and there is a responsibility that goes with this. Do they inspire public trust and confidence (because if there is a problem with one of them this can impact on public trust in the entire sector)? (figures quoted by Nick Donaldson, Senior Advisor- Charity Commission 2009)

- Be involved with Fair Trade.

Does your church serve Fair Trade coffee and tea? Is your town designated as a Fair Trade town? Many churches sell Fair Trade goods through such organisations as Traidcraft, Tearfund or The Leprosy Mission – could the group develop collective responsibility to promote support for Fair Trade within the church and amongst their neighbours and friends?

- Look at our own lifestyles

We may think that making changes to the way we live or our attitudes will not make any difference but is that so? For example, the phrase 'carbon footprint' is used so much these days. Do we think that turning off lights, using energy saving bulbs, cutting down on our fuel consumption and so on makes any difference?

There is much talk and debate about climate change. Do we just think about this in terms of our own situation or think of others where climate change could mean losing everything? A rise in water levels could devastate huge areas of Bangladesh. Some Pacific islands may be fully submerged. A rise in temperatures could produce severe drought in areas that are already dry; impacting on people's ability to grow their own crops and feed themselves, affecting the landscape, wildlife etc.

It is all well and good talking about feeding the hungry, fighting injustice, working to relieve poverty but if it impacts on our own lifestyle, how far are we prepared to go?

To close this session there could be a time of open prayer, a song or music to help people reflect upon what God is saying to them.

Suggested hymns/songs.

The kingdom of God (Byrn Rees 1911-83)

Give me a heart that will love the unlovely (G.E. Hutchinson 1988)

May the mind of Christ my Saviour (Kate B Wilkinson 1859-1928)

O Lord, the clouds are gathering (Graham Kendrick 1987)

I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation (People of Destiny International 1982)

Please note the timetable from Week Four (page 4) about the use of time should be given out to each group member so that it can be completed prior to next week's discussion.