

# Study Three - Giving & receiving



Matthew 5:6,7 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

You might also like to read:

Matthew 12:7

Colossians 3:12

Proverbs 14:31

'What is less often noticed is that it is precisely the kind of moral instruction that parents are constantly trying to give their children — concrete, imaginative, teaching general principles from particular instances, and seeking all the time to bring the children to appreciate and share the parent's own attitudes and view of life... The all-embracing principles of conduct'

(J.I. Packer, Knowing God)

## Starting points



Righteousness has within it the meaning of integrity, morality, equality and justice. How does the church in general do when it comes to tackling these kinds of issues in society?



What are the biggest concerns you have for the well-being of the society in which you live. Is there anything that a local or national church can do to address these concerns?



With so many desperate situations in the world, caused either by natural disaster or human behaviour, is compassion fatigue a growing, and perhaps worrying problem?

## Of mercy and justice

The Old Testament prophets might despair at the waywardness of the people they spoke to, but their faith was in a God who was consistent. Micah was a simple man with a passion for social justice, who was disturbed to see the corruption and immorality in Jerusalem spreading out to the poorer region from where he came.

Micah had a vision of God's justice coming down hard upon the people, particularly those who exploited the weak, and those responsible for the spiritual decline and decay that surrounded him.

It was not good news that Micah brought, and it was a difficult burden for him to carry. But there was still hope, all was not lost, God's kingdom would be established - familiar words from Micah 5:2-5, a prophesy fulfilled in Jesus' birth, and looking forward to his second coming.

In Micah 7:18-20 the prophet remembers God's love, mercy and compassion from the past, and in faith sees this as hope for the future, when God will rule in power and bring his sheep back into the fold.

Turn back a page to Micah 6:6-8 and we see that we are to be imitators of the character of God in the way we interact with others and in our walk with Him.

'He has shown you, O man, what is Good... to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'



Micah prophesied around 735 BC, but we can perhaps see echoes today. What should our response be?

## Humanity and humility

Hunger and thirst were familiar to many in Jesus' time. Wages were low, drinking water had to be found, starvation was not uncommon. These are challenges that many in the world still endure every day of their lives.

This first beatitude is a stronger challenge than it might appear. It asks, 'Do you want to see right and justice prevail as much as someone dying of thirst desires water?'

This is about wanting with a passion!

Of course, not all who hunger in this way for injustices to be righted are going to see their goals fully achieved, so where is their blessing?

You might like to discuss this point.

Maybe the blessing comes in part from belonging to a community of like-minded individuals, with the knowledge that this is an offering acceptable to God, looking forward as it does to God's kingdom being seen on earth as it is in heaven (The Lord's Prayer).

'All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honour, duty, mercy, hope.'

(Winston Churchill)

'The militancy of men, through all the centuries, has drenched the world with blood. The militancy of women has harmed no human life save the lives of those who fought the battle of righteousness.'

(Emmeline Pankhurst)

'While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight; I'll fight to the very end!'

(General William Booth)

The Lord's Prayer, given in Matthew 6, ends with these words 'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'

It is common sense really, isn't it? You can't expect mercy to be given if you're not prepared to offer it yourself.

But there's more in the original meaning of 'mercy' as Jesus used it. In this context the word means getting inside the mind of the other person and seeing the situation from their point of view. When things go wrong in our relationships, or we find ourselves in a long-running argument, how many of us can truthfully say that we try and do this?

It can make forgiveness so much easier when we understand the reason why, and help facilitate reconciliation.

## Talking it through



Another translation of 'righteousness' in v.5 might be 'God's justice'. What does this term mean to you?



How often do we pray for justice and righteousness in church? Are we hungry enough to want this in the world?



How easy do you find it to forgive someone who has wronged or offended you? Are there limits?



David Pawson\* says 'Justice and mercy... travel the same road together. The difference is that justice can only go so far, but mercy takes over and goes further, and God is the supreme master of both.' How much should mercy figure in our justice system?

\*Pawson D, Unlocking the Bible, Collins, 2003