

Sunday, September 13 Matthew c18 v21 to 35

Back in 2006 the Rockstar Bono addressed the National prayer breakfast in Washington with these words:

*“It’s no coincidence that the Scriptures mention the word poverty over 2,100 times it’s not an accident to mention something 2100 times. Do you know the only time Christ is judgemental is on the subject of the poor. In Matthew c25v40 Jesus says “as you have done it to least of these, you’ve done it on to me” Christ is good news to the poor.”*

Within the content of the Bible is the “bias to the poor” the downtrodden, the overlooked, the vulnerable. Today it is still the same there are millions of people who suffer at the hands of the powerful, the influential and the affluent.

Hearing God’s word is the call to right the wrongs, to level the playing field, to care for the orphan, the widow, the stranger and the refugee which in our society doesn’t come easily.

Last week I mentioned how the gospel writer Matthew styled his gospel on the five books of Moses, with five sections of teaching developing the ideas of the Kingdom of God. Moses was calling a new nation into being and so is Jesus. Within the teaching of Moses is the principle of the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25.

We use Jubilee to be a celebration of a period of time, the Queens Diamond Jubilee, the Millennium to cancel international debt. Jubilee in the Bible echoed the weekly sabbath rest, and every 50yrs it was a reset of the economy and land ownership. In the 50th year the land lay fallow, debts were cancelled, property and land restored to the original owners. So a new beginning is possible for everyone, and as a nation. This is a truly radical idea; to cancel debts, to restore land, to forgive on a society level.

However in Jewish history there is no record of this Jubilee principle being acted upon. The idea of Jubilee, of new beginning, is behind much of Jesus teaching from his first preaching in Nazareth to the current parable.

At the start of J ministry in Nazareth [Luke c4] Jesus quotes “Isaiah 61 “the spirit of the Lord is on me to preach good news to the poor. To proclaim freedom to prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, released the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” This quote is a Jubilee declaration as Jesus sought to bring a new start not only for people’s lives but to the Jewish nation. Its underlying principle is echoed in today’s parable of debts being cancelled.

In today’s reading we discover Jesus doesn’t want Jubilee to be every 50 years but to be a constant of the kingdom. A constant provision of forgiveness.

When Peter asks how often to forgive- seven times? As that sounds a lot, when the rabbi only taught three times.

Jesus says “no 70x7” it is to be a continuous action.

In other translations 7x7 and 7x7 is 49 - the Jubilee principle that every year is a new beginning, every day is a chance to be restored.

Jesus wants the overlooked principle of Jubilee to be a daily action by his followers, 70x7 forgiveness. Not holding back but restoring relationships and lives.

Jesus illustrates this with a parable, which is very contemporary to our society. The financial amounts are amazing and almost laughable in scale.

10,000 talents that's equivalent to the earnings of 200,000 years of work. Who could earn that much? well today we know of big businesses who have far more wealth than needed. Think of Apple, Amazon, Starbucks to name a few.

The 100 denarii by comparison is so insignificant, one denarii is one day's pay so 100 denarii is three months pay which by comparison is SO insignificant.

In our society who is squeezed for tax? Not the rich but the poor. Not the corporations but the individuals. We know it's true. Who gets a taxbreaks? The multinationals do but the local businesses don't.

The parable hits home on so many levels while it's a

financial illustration it's also about forgiveness: forgiveness of debts, of wrongs.

In God scheme it's the debtors who need mercy. God is against unjust structures and systems of society that oppress people. He was then and God still is today.

We as the people of God, people who receive forgiveness, who know God's grace - are the ones who are called to demonstrate forgiveness and to fight for justice for all.

We are called to challenge society as a church militant here on earth. To change the unjust structures so that Gods Jubilee is a reality - not just for ourselves but for the poor, the oppressed, those caught in slavery, the refugee, the worker in the sweatshops, the orphan and a widow.

The church knows God has a Jubilee and it's not to be kept to ourselves but shared, fought for, and acted upon at every level of society. So that the church changes society and it is changed, reformed, renewed. And every person discovers life in abundance.

The Old Testament Jubilee ideal is a kingdom principal that the church needs to recover and fight for in our society and generation. Too often people say politics and religion aren't connected, well this teaching challenges that thought.

Amen