

A Prophetic Community

“Throughout his ministry Jesus confronted injustice and hypocrisy. He also challenged human concepts of power, wealth, status and security. Radical commitment to Jesus therefore implies a suspicion of the dominant trends in society, religion and culture.”

Read Luke 4:14-30 and 6:20-31.

The quote above suggests that Jesus taught in such a way as to challenge the accepted values of society. What examples of that do you find in these passages?

Can you think of other examples of Jesus confronting political or religious authority?

Doesn't the Bible encourage us to be law-abiding members of society? Is this in conflict with the calling to be prophetic?

Why should society listen to Christians speaking out about injustice?

Read Amos 5:1-24

What injustices do you think need to be addressed in our own society?

How can our church play a part in addressing them? What should we do?

Read Case Studies (pp36-37)

What lessons do you think these stories have for us?

An Inclusive Community

“Since Jesus exemplified the Kingdom values expressed by the Old Testament prophets, and specifically identified caring for the needy as service to Him, we should reflect his unfailing love for the fallen, the excluded, the poor and hungry, the oppressed, voiceless and powerless.”

Read Luke 14:15-24.

Often our impression of the Old Testament is that God seems to be concentrating on just one community, the Jews, and desires to keep that community pure and separate.

- Can you think of Old Testament examples of God including those who were not ‘the chosen people’?
- Why did God choose ‘a people for himself’? What were they meant to do?

What does the parable of the Great Banquet say to you about Jesus’ attitude to the outcast? Can you illustrate that with specific examples from his ministry?

Read Acts 15:6-21

Acts 15 is the account of the early Church trying to decide how non-Jewish believers should be integrated into the Church. Did they have to become Jews first? Paul insists that God does not require this.

- Do you think that the Jerusalem Church leaders lost their nerve? Or was their compromise a good solution?
- Do you think we expect things of new believers that are beyond what God looks for?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

In the developing world, the gospel often has a great appeal to the poor, the outcast, the dispossessed and the voiceless. Yet in the West, ‘Church’ is much more middle class. Why do you think this is?

- Which groups of people around our church would be considered ‘outsiders’? How can we include such people?
- What barriers can you identify that might exclude people in such groups?

Read Case Studies (pp38-39)

Talk about the first two situations there - how would you respond?

A Sacrificial Community

“Following Jesus means following a crucified Saviour, who laid down His life in service. This creates distinctive communities... Baptist communities will resist the temptations of worldly power and triumphalism. We will recognise the importance of vulnerability and the necessity of sacrifice as the path to resurrection and new life.”

Read Luke 14:25-33.

A person who was seen to be ‘carrying his cross’ was clearly on his way to execution. Jesus calls us to share in his death here. But there are some aspects of his death at Calvary that we can’t share - what might they be?

So then - having identified what we *can't* accomplish, what *can* we share? Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die” - what does Jesus call us to sacrifice for Him?

Read Mark 8:34-38

Mark has some very similar words of Jesus. It’s easy just to focus on the individual applications of these words - ‘what price am I prepared to pay to live as a disciple of Jesus?’ - but the study notes ask some questions that relate to our community life - see what you make of these:

- To what extent is our church life governed by these values?
- Is there a difference between a serving church and a sacrificial church?
- Much of church life is about building up the church; about church growth, about succeeding as a church. What would it mean for a church to lose itself?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Here’s a biblical example - the churches of Macedonia - of sacrificial living & giving.

- How can we demonstrate the same spirit?
- Are there practical examples of this kind of sharing that you can think of?
- How could this work apart from giving money?

Read Case Studies (pp40-41)

Talk about the first and the third situations there - how would you respond? (you can always look at other examples from these pages if they interest you; these are just suggestions!)