

WEEK 3 : "Speak Courageously"

Sunday, August 16, 2009

BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

Cnr Marcus and Thompsons Roads,
LOWER TEMPLESTOWE VIC 3017

Notes by Rev. Gary Lockyer
www.bulleenbaptist.org.au



Introducing the 50:50 Studies

We will be following the 50:50 themes in the five Sundays in August. This 5 week teaching and study program helps churches and individuals seek God's view on the poor and sets out practical ways that Christians can respond and make a difference. Each Sunday's teaching session is supplemented by linked Small Group Studies during the week.

These Studies have been prepared by the Australian staff of Baptist World Aid to celebrate 50 years of working on behalf of Australian Baptists with the world's poor, helping them to lift themselves out of extreme poverty.

Check out Baptist World Aid Australia's website at www.shareanopportunity.org and click on the 50:50 graphic on the home page of our website to go straight to the 50:50 website to explore the information, links and resources there as well.

1. A RULER'S RESPONSIBILITY

The Old Testament clearly sets out the responsibilities of Kings:

- A. Their MORAL radar: Kings detest wrong doing ... **Prov16:12a**
- B. The LEGITIMACY of their rule: ... a throne is established through righteousness **Prov16:12b**
- C. Their ADVOCACY for the poor : (O King Lemuel) Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. **Prov31:8**
- D. Their delivery of JUSTICE : Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy. **Proverbs 31:8-9**

The Psalmist, in praising the King of Israel, sums all this up in a stirring challenge:

In your majesty ride forth victoriously on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness. **Psalm 45:4**

Centuries later, living under the vastly different political reality of the Roman Empire, Paul speaks of the right use of "governing authority" :

... rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. **Rom13:3.**

Peter agrees:

governors ... punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. **1Ptr2:14**

Compared to the Psalmist's, the language of these two New Testament references is much more prosaic, but the principle is the same: God requires that human government (of any form, anywhere, and at any time) is to "DO RIGHT"

2. A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Blessed is he who has regard for the weak **Psalm 41:1**

"Kings" may have a specific responsibility,
and the greater power and authority to effect change and see that justice is done,
but caring for the plight of the poor is not just a function of "government" :

It is our COMMON responsibility ...

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern. **Prov29:7**

... and an IDENTIFYING characteristic of one who would be "right" before God.

Therefore, points A to D from Section 1, are our responsibilities as well.

Note Job's self-assessment: (from Job 29:7-17)

When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet ... because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing.

I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy;

I took up the case of the stranger.
I broke the fangs of the wicked
and snatched the victims from their teeth.

**ADVOCACY
STRUCTURAL CHANGE
SOCIAL ACTION**

3. A PROPHETIC TASK

Job's example is of an individual who acted responsibly and within the limits of his influence. But is this enough? What about when "government" does not live up to its God-given responsibility.

In our society, as citizens we have a DEMOCRATIC right to INFLUENCE our government.

And, as Christians, we also have a MANDATE from God to REMIND our government of its responsibilities. For example: (from 2Sam12)

The LORD sent Nathan to David ... I anointed you king over Israel ... Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own.

Now, we are not ancient Israel, and our government is not "anointed" as was David, but the principles are the same because (as Section 1 pointed out) all human "authority" is called by God to "do good." Where it falls short (as it will), we have the responsibility, under God, to stand with the poor and call ATTENTION to its shortcomings and ENCOURAGE it to do better.

Given that Businesses and Corporations in our society also have social obligations, established both by law and community expectation, our "prophetic task" may extend to them also.

AN EXERCISE TODAY

A COMMITMENT TO MAKE:

In recognising our role to

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves ... Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. **Prov31:8**

we pledge ourselves to follow the example of Job, and where possible be advocates, work for structural change, and take up social action on behalf of the world's poor.

ACTIONS TO TAKE:

The first step is to educate ourselves to the need and what can be done.

Take up the literature that is available from time to time from our Foyer from Australian Baptist World Aid. (Or plug into the literature from a wider range of organisations of your choice, such as World Vision, Compassion etc.)

Read the literature and do your own research - often further reading and other resources are mentioned. The internet is a great way of finding out a wealth of information on a wide variety of issues.

Upon conviction, take action as suggested; write letters, sign petitions, join an interest group, give financially, pray.

Use your friendship network to raise awareness and encourage others to join with you.

We will be suggesting a number of avenues of involvement over the next few weeks for your consideration.