



THE NEW SHOFAR

Do Justice and live Godly lives

Living in the world under God as Jesus so lived

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Maintain justice and do what is right

In chapter 55 of Isaiah God had opened up to His people a wonderful set of visions and promises about the future. It would be a time of great blessings, joy and peace. They might well be thinking about the horrors of their exile in Babylon, but because Yahweh was the Lord of all, their hope was secure.

This guarantee of a new and glorious future was a free, undeserved gift from God. It is what God does and who God is. And yet it comes with mutual responsibilities. To live in this renewed creation, Yahweh demanded lives of *justice* and *righteousness*. These were to be the descriptors of the post-Exilic Israel.

Key here are the Hebrew understandings of the verbs used. *Justice* was not about specific individual acts. They were to be living justly; maintaining justice as a way of life. It was not something to write in a statement of beliefs. It was to be actively lived.

The primary sense of *mishpat/justice* is to exercise the processes of government. It was a legal term but when taken up and used by the prophets it is applied to a collaboration with the rule of God in creation. It is about *doing* the divine will – in every aspect of human living. It refers to living in creation as God's *image and likeness*, about exercising stewardship over this world as God would act, pursuing divine goals.

Associated with this is another significant biblical word – *righteousness/tzedek*. The way we *do justice* is by *doing righteousness*...doing what is right in the eyes of God. Again, it is not doing the right thing in specific moments. It is about living a way of life characterised by right-living, living in the way in which we were created to live by the God who calls, empowers, guides and forgives our failings. It is the way of life that applies to others that which is poured out on ourselves by God.

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths..

Bringing the eunuchs into our text can seem odd but Isaiah is making a significant point. Eunuchs were common enough at the time. They were however excluded from Hebrew worship, unable to join with the community of Israel in the presence of God. They were disfigured, incomplete and therefore ritually unclean. Unable to worship, their hopes of being righteous were zero and any hope of eternal blessing a waste of time.

Now look what God is saying here. These unclean people will be given in *my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.* They are welcome in the very house of God, right there inside the heavenly walls where God Himself makes a home. Of course, this is metaphorical language but its power is clear. Eunuchs are going to be even better, more precious, even more greatly loved than sons and daughters who were considered to be gifts from God. A eunuch at one with God in the heavenly abode!

That would have been a stunning revelation to Israel. The unclean (and in the next verses God includes the foreigners in this promise) at home with God. God's house is a *house of prayer* for everyone? It is how they live that is important to God.

How then is God going to judge us?

The prophet Micah answers this question succinctly when he teaches that what God wants is for men and women to ***do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.*** It is not about baptism, or circumcision, or obeying the laws of Leviticus. It is about living in the world in the way Jesus the Christ lived in the world. Notice all of these action words, the powerful verbs that imply continuous actions. Texts such as **Psalm 106:3** support this vision by linking heavenly blessing to those who *live in the way of justice and do righteousness in all things/at all times.*

This is not a novel idea arising among the prophets. The Covenanted relationship with Israel required of the people accept how it is *justice and only justice you shall follow* if they wanted to inherit the land God was offering them (Deuteronomy). This is the background against which Jesus preached his teaching on the Last Judgment in **Matthew 25** and His Sermon on the Mount. What then is justice and right living?

Pursuing justice and living rightly will change the world in Christ

Chapter 5 of Amos is a beautiful collection of promises and sayings meant as an encouragement to a struggling Israel. If they repent and return to God; if they change their lives and priorities, God will bring them to a whole new life in a transformed creation. All they need to do is *hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate.* Again, what we have are verbs – ways of living in the world on a daily basis.

For Amos, this transformation is something God will do in them, for them and through them. *Doing justice and living rightly* are likened by Amos to the power of waters rolling down a hill, an ever-flowing stream. These cleanse, refresh and bring life to whatever they touch. The unexpected becomes possible, hopes fulfilled and life given meaning that no human way of thinking or acting could ever achieve.

That is the personal and parish challenge here. The entire Bible is built on the Truth of this teaching. By ***doing justice*** and ***living in the right-way***, God's will becomes evident in creation. Justice should not be limited to some of the more high-profile areas – refugees, deaths in custody, human rights, etc. It must include the fullness of our lives on earth – the environment, climate, extinction of flora and fauna, animal husbandry economic justice, family, working life, future planning and the way we are governed, all of these things are important to God and a part of our role of ruling over creation in God's name. These are areas for our ministries of justice and righteousness.