

# Do Justice: Radical Compassion

## Isaiah 58:6-12

[INTRO]: Good morning, Cornerstone. It is great to be back with you again this morning. Please turn in your Bible with me to the book of **Isaiah, chapter 58**.

We are continuing and concluding our two part series this morning entitled “Do Justice,” exploring together what it looks like for God’s people to be people committed to justice. We were reminded last week of the word of God to us through the prophet Micah: **(Micah 6:8) “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”** To be followers of Jesus Christ means to love what God loves and to do what He calls us to do. This includes the call to do justice.

Last week, we looked at an aspect of doing justice from the standpoint of our relationships - that to do justice means to pursue right relationships. This starts with our vertical relationship - a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. And then out of that overflow, our horizontal relationships - being people who are pursuing peace and reconciliation in our relationship with others. This is part of what it means to be people of justice.

This morning we are going to look at another important aspect of biblical justice - the ministry of mercy and compassion to which we have been called.

**[SLIDE]** (C.H. Spurgeon) “Churches are not made that men of ready speech may stand up on Sundays and talk, and so win daily bread from their admirers. No, there is another end and aim for this. These places of worship are not built that you may sit comfortably and hear something that shall make you pass away your Sundays with pleasure. A church which does not exist to do good in the slums, and dens, and kennels of the city, is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existing. A church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight with evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice and to hold up righteousness, is a church that has no right to be.”

Those are some strong and provocative words that I will leave you to wrestle with. But the point that is being made is that one of the distinguishing marks of the people of God is that they are committed to pursuing justice by caring for and standing with the poor. That it’s not just enough to check the boxes of attending a Sunday morning service and doing our Bible reading plans. We must be willing to get messy by engaging in the work of radical mercy and compassion to those around us.

As we turn again this morning to **Isaiah 58, verse 6-12**, this is exactly what we are going to see God calling His people to do.

**[SLIDE] To be people of justice means to engage in radical Christ-centred ministry of mercy and compassion.**

So hear now the word of the Lord for us today from **Isaiah 58:1-12**. **[Read passage]** This is God’s Word. Thanks be to God!

[CONTEXT]: Let’s remind ourselves of the context of these verses as we pick up at verse 6 from where we left off last week. Remember that the people whom God is speaking to were doing all of the right things from an outward standpoint. Like the Pharisees and religious teachers that Jesus encountered, they were checking the boxes of fasting, seeking God, praying for His righteous judgments. But God was

rejecting their worship. It wasn't what He was looking for. All of their religious activity was just smoke and mirrors. It wasn't rooted in a right relationship with God. And furthermore, it wasn't having any impact on how the people were treating others around them afterward.

As we look at the next verses here in this section, what we are going to see is a series of if and then statements. If you do this, then this will happen. If you pursue radical Christ-centered ministry of mercy and compassion, then this is how God will respond. So let's begin then by looking at our responsibility, and then move to God's response.

➤ **[SLIDE] Our responsibility: We are to seek to bring freedom to the oppressed and to be generous to the poor and destitute (v.6-7, 9b-10a)**

Before we dive into these verses, I want to start by addressing a concern that comes up from time to time in conservative part of the swimming pool of Christianity.

Tim Keller, in the opening part of his book "Generous Justice" talks about this:

**[SLIDE]** "In the twentieth century the American church divided between the liberal mainline that stressed social justice and the fundamentalist churches that emphasized personal salvation...In the mind of many orthodox Christians, therefore, "doing justice" is inextricably linked with the loss of sound doctrine and spiritual dynamism."

The point that is being made is that somehow this conversation about what it means to "do justice" has become a dividing line between liberal and conservative Christianity. That you can either be about the gospel or about doing the good works of serving the poor. You can be about justification, or you can be about justice.

On the one hand conservatives are looking at liberals and are very suspicious of them because they think they have abandoned the gospel and sound doctrine in order to just do good works. On the other hand, liberal Christianity is looking back and saying, "You're all about the gospel and salvation and checking the boxes of doctrine, but you aren't doing anything to care for the poor."

I have had a few conversations over the years with pastors in my role at Prison Fellowship Canada where as we share a meal or have a coffee together I ask them to tell me about their church and what their ministry of mercy and compassion looks like. From time to time, the response I'll get is something like this. "We are all about the gospel, and are really just focused on the gospel right now. We don't do much for the poor, the homeless, the widow or the orphan, or the prisoner. We leave that for others, because we are focused on the gospel." And in some ways, I get their line of thinking...I just think it's incomplete.

**[SLIDE]** (Timothy Keller) "A heart poured out in deeds of mercy and justice to the poor is the inevitable sign that you have been justified."

When you have personally encountered and been transformed by the gospel, when you have come face to face with your own brokenness and spiritual poverty before God, when you have experienced the transforming work of God's mercy and compassion toward you - when that has truly happened, the inevitable outcome is that you begin to pour out that same radical mercy and compassion on those around you. It's not either/or. In fact, justification and justice are inextricably linked!

So what does this look like? What does it mean for us as God's people, those who have been justified, to fulfill our responsibility to pursue justice through ministry of mercy and compassion? Look with me at Isaiah 58:6.

**#1: It begins with seeking to bring freedom to those who are oppressed: (v.6) "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"**

Do you see this concept of liberation and freedom that's running through this verse? Notice what God is saying to them. He's telling them that the poor around them are trapped in the "bonds" or chains of wickedness. They are tied up in the "straps of the yoke" that has been placed upon them. What God wants to see is that they "loose the bonds of wickedness," that they "undo the straps of the yoke" and that they "let the oppressed go free." The people were mistreating or crushing the poor around them. God wanted to see freedom come!

In our world, the need for freedom from oppression comes in many forms. First and foremost, to be people who seek to bring freedom to the oppressed means to help people experience the freedom from the oppression of sin. **Romans 6** talks about how through faith in Jesus Christ we are "set free from sin."

But oppression can take other forms as well - racial oppression, economic oppression, poverty, human trafficking, abuse, mental illness, physical disabilities.

Let me take a moment to give you a general snapshot of the people we have the privilege of serving at Prison Fellowship Canada:

- 70-80% of federal offenders have a problem with substance abuse
- Majority of people in custody have witnessed family violence as a child or been involved in the child welfare system
- Mental illness rates are 4 to 7 times more common in prison than in the community
- 22% of male prisoners and 33% of female prisoners reported being sexually abused as a child
- More than 1 in 5 have attempted suicide
- 15-20% of aboriginal person in federal custody have attended residential schools

I remember talking to a former prisoner who was continuing to abuse drugs. I asked him why he continued to do so even though he knew it was hurting him. His response: "It's the only thing that numbs my pain."

When we look at the example of Jesus, we see in His ministry this idea of bringing freedom to the oppressed. Many times, He looked at people and declared that their sins were forgiven. He set them free from the oppression of sin and condemnation that they were under. But we also see Jesus in places like **Mark 5, Mark 7, and Mark 9**, for example, when Jesus encounters people caught in demonic oppression, and He set them free! In **Luke 13:12**, Jesus said to a woman who had been disabled for 18 years, "You are freed from your disability" and she was.

**[SLIDE]** (Luke 4:18-19) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

**#2: We are to seek to be generous to the poor and destitute.**

Look back at **Isaiah 58**, and notice what it says in: (v.7) **Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh.**" Notice as well in: (v.10a) "if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted."

What is God saying to the people here? He is calling them to be concerned for the poor and destitute around them. He is saying to them, "It's great that you're taking a Sabbath day and engaging in the discipline of fasting by withholding food. But what if you do this instead? What if you take all the bread that you aren't eating that day and feed the hungry around you? What if you invite the homeless poor into your home? What about going through your closets and drawers and taking all of those clothes you don't wear anymore and giving them to the people around you who are poorly clothed? That's what I would like to see. That's the kind of fast that I would choose!"

According to some recent studies that were published, approximately 13-18% of households in Orillia specifically fall into the category of low-income, which is higher than the average rate across Canada. At PFC, we know that for someone being released back into the community, the ability to find a stable job and a stable place to live within 30 days is a key factor toward staying out of prison or jail moving forward. Yet with so many facing addictions, mental health issues, and trying to find a job with a criminal record, it presents a major mountain to climb, particularly if they don't have a stable community supporting them.

**[SLIDE]** (1 John 3:17-18) "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

**[SLIDE]** (James 2:14-17) "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

**[SLIDE]** (Matthew 25:35-36) "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

What's the point? To be a follower of Jesus Christ means to take responsibility to serve the poor and destitute around us. It means to share practical care and concern to those who are on the margins. So what does that look like for you and for me? What can you do to own that responsibility a bit more?

I'm so encouraged right now by the conversation that is happening between Cornerstone and Prison Fellowship Canada about how Prison Fellowship can help equip and mobilize teams of people to minister in the name of Jesus Christ to whether that is in-prison teams at Beaver Creek, the federal prison up in Gravenhurst, or at the provincial jail in Penetanguishene. Whether that's ministering to those who have been released from prison and jail and are seeking to integrate into the community here in Orillia. Or ministering to the children of the incarcerated here in Orillia through our Angel Tree program. I know that this church is committed and continuing to find ways to bring freedom to the oppressed and to be generous to the poor and destitute in the name of Jesus Christ.

So my challenge or exhortation to you today is to continue on this path. Continue to lean into the work of justice in this way. And if you're not a part of any of it right now, then find a way get involved. Take hold of your responsibility to be a part of doing justice in this way.

➤ **[SLIDE]** **God's response: Mercy and compassion invites God's favour and blessing (v.8-9a, 10b-12)**

Look at the text again with me. This is the second part of the “if/then” that is being communicated by God to people. If, in **verse 7**, you seek to bring freedom to the oppressed...if, in **verse 8**, you pursue generosity in my name to the poor and destitute among you...(v.9b) “If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,” then notice what will happen.

Notice God’s response: (v.8) “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, “Here I am.””

Look down at (v.10b-12) “then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a springwater, whose waters do not fail. 12 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.”

What exactly is happening here? God is using some incredible imagery to describe the blessing and favour that He will pour out on His people as they engage in the fast that He chooses, as they do what He has called them to do. The principle here is that when we love what God loves, when we do what He calls us to do, when we follow His ways and pursue that which is important to Him, we invite the favour and blessing of God upon us. This includes the pursuit of justice by bringing freedom to the oppressed and generosity to the poor.

**[SLIDE]** (Deuteronomy 15:7-10)“If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, ‘The seventh year, the year of release is near,’ and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

Look back at the text and notice how God describes what His favour and blessing will look like in this way:

#1: (v.8a) “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily.” The language being used here is similar to (Isaiah 60:1-4) Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”

Caring for the oppressed and the poor will shine the light of God’s glory to the peoples and nations around them, testifying to His salvation. Jesus said, (Matthew 5:16) “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

#2: Notice also that God’s blessing includes His presence and protection over His people: (v.8b) “your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, “Here I am.” The people were wondering why God

wasn't responding to their worship and seeking of Him. God is saying that when you care for the poor and oppressed, you won't have any concerns about me responding. Here I am!

#3: God's blessing includes His promise of guidance and of His supply of strength and satisfaction. (v.11) "And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." Do you want to experience a fresh sense of spiritual vitality in your life? Be generous to the poor. Do you want to feel like you've left the sprinkler system on all night in the garden of your soul? Pour yourself out for the hungry.

#4: God's blessing includes His promise of restoration of what is broken. (v.12) "And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in." This week my wife and I have had a contractor digging out a trench outside of the foundation of our home so that he can waterproof it and stop the water that has been seeping into our basement. He's repairing and restoring what is broken. Listen! God is in the business of restoration. He is able to restore all that is broken through His power in our lives as we trust in Him. He restores relationships that are broken, lives that have been ruined by sin. God can rebuild, raise up, repair and restore.

So here's the point of all that this morning:

**[SLIDE]** (Proverbs 19:17) "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed."

If we pursue the things that God loves, if we pour ourselves out doing what He has called us to do - then we invite the favour and blessing of God into our lives. His blessing and favour is not something that is entitled to us. It's not like earning a pay cheque from God, that He somehow owes us anything.

It's all about His grace. (2 Corinthians 9:8) "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

[CONCLUSION]: So where do we go from here?

(Micah 6:8) "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

#1. I want to invite you to take another step forward into **the slums, and dens, and kennels of the city**. I want to invite you to not be afraid to roll up your sleeves and get messy in the name of Jesus Christ. Invite the Lord to take you out of your comfort zone, and to show you how you can take up your God-given responsibility to do justice by bringing freedom to the oppressed and being generous to the poor. Find a way to do that more fully today, this week, and in the weeks to come.

#2. I want to invite you to take some time to stare and ponder more fully all that Jesus has done for you. (2 Corinthians 8:9) **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.**

The reason why we are who we are and have experienced what we have experienced is because of God's grace toward us. In our most poor and desperate place, He did not leave us on our own. But in His love and mercy and compassion, Jesus Christ came to us in our helpless estate. He became poor so that by His poverty we might become rich through the knowledge of Him. The gospel is what motivates us to do

justice. The gospel is what should stir us up and spur us on to extend that same love and compassion to the world around us. May it be so...and may God help us to do it more and more for His glory alone!

**[Prayer]**