



NO MORE GLOOM

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

December 4, 2016

Discussion Guide

No More Injustice

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- What, if anything, do you know about the darkness of oppression in our world? What, if anything, do you think people can actually do about it?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- Using the notes, discuss the context of oppression. Discuss how oppression was an issue, even in the time of Isaiah.
- Read Isaiah 11.1-9 aloud. Seek to hear the text as one of the poor of Israel, oppressed by the rich elite. Pause. Read the text aloud once more. Seek to hear the text as one of the oppressed in our world today. Pause. Read the text once more. Seek to hear the text as a follower of Christ living in a world darkened by oppression.
- As you hear this prophecy, what elements of hope concerning oppression does it contain?
- In what ways do people typically approach the issue of oppression? In what ways, if any, does this approach differ?
- What is the typical outcome of the way people generally approach the issue of oppression? Could you elaborate?
- How, if at all, might the approach Isaiah describes lead people to address the issue of oppression differently? Could you elaborate?
- What might it look like to live these ways out in real life?
- What, if anything, hinders you from living in these ways?
- Consider closing by praying for those who are oppressed. Pray for hope to permeate their life and yours, and for God to guide you to act upon this hope.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

OPPRESSION

Oppression involves the violation of rights and the denigration of a person's inherent dignity. Oppression often involves an assault against one's self-identity and may involve the exploitation of one's labor for the benefit of another. People who oppress others are able to do so because they find themselves in a place where they possess more wealth and power than another and are able to use their wealth and power to oppress the other. Oppression happens on many levels including at the family level with one family member subjugating another (think of abuse), but we are most familiar with societal forms and specific acts of oppression.

Societal forms of oppression involve the systemic mistreatment of others simply because they belong to a specific group or class. This group or class may be defined by race, color of skin, sexual orientation, or anything determined to set a specific group of people apart from others. Sometimes this form of oppression is referred to as Institutional oppression. We are most familiar with it in our American context of the struggle for the civil rights of African Americans, but many other forms of this oppression exist today in weaker variations such as stereotyping and prejudice. While the common person might not consider stereotyping or prejudice to be oppression, the simple reality is that any grouping of people which leads to a different/lesser treatment of them as individuals is oppression.

Perhaps the most widely publicized form of worldwide oppression is human trafficking which involves the intentional subjugation of persons for the purpose of benefiting from their labor. About a quarter of all human trafficking is sexual in nature, the enslavement of people to support sex trades such as prostitution. However, the majority of human trafficking involves the use of forced labor of unwilling individuals. The primary tool for this involves debt slavery, a practice which traps poor individuals in a factory or job through the charging of exorbitant interest on small loans necessary for survival in their context. Almost 21 million people are estimated to be involved in some form of human trafficking, though others have estimated much higher totals.

While we might expect that these forms of trafficking, particularly the use of forced labor,

involve the intentional subjugation of people, the reality is that these forms of trafficking are most often the direct result of western consumerism. Consumer economies of western countries are built upon the rapid production and consumption of cheap goods. However, many of the goods central to these economies are not cheap. Examples of expensive items include things like coffee and steel. However, market forces from larger western countries entice smaller developing countries to allow or even encourage forced labor in order to drive down prices so they might be part of the global consumer economy. For example, demand for cheap coffee and chocolate leads to the forced use of children to pick beans. These children are often not paid and are kept from going to school because they are needed to harvest coffee and cocoa crops to supply the high demand of western consumers. Another example is that of steel. The demand for steel to make everything from cars to cans has led countries like Brazil to turn a blind eye to slave camps in the rain forests which make charcoal because this cheap form of fuel powers the Brazilian steel factories which supply much of the steel America uses. This form of oppression, while real and serious, is unconscious on the part of the western consumer who is unaware that the cost of their active consumption of goods is being born by others.

Up until the two great wars of the early twentieth-century, the Church was deeply concerned with forms of oppression. However, the experience of great devastation and chaos, particularly that of WWII, led the Evangelical Church to dismiss many forms of social concern as fruitless. This was supported by a spiritualizing of biblical texts which refer to oppression and higher emphasis given to submission to ruling powers and patience in the face of suffering. However, more recently, the Evangelical Church has begun to awaken to its biblical calling to address oppression. Recognition is being given to the fact that God is portrayed throughout Scripture as a defender and refuge of the oppressed (Psalm 9.9; 34.18; 72.4; 146.7; Isaiah 1.17; Zechariah 7.10) and that Jesus' gospel ministry directly addressed oppression (Luke 4.18-19). Churches like Willow Creek, under the direction of Bill Hybels, have undertaken initiatives intended to address forms of oppression, even partnering with people like Bono to gain a greater cultural voice.

What next steps the Evangelical Church will take in

addressing oppression is somewhat debated as this branch of the Church has only most recently re-awakened to its existence. Some fear that the Church will be lulled to complacency in much the same way as it was after WWII, the vast extent of oppression causing the Church to become paralyzed because the problem seems too big. However, the mission of the Church is not to eradicate all forms of oppression. Ultimately, this job belongs to God alone. The Church is called to address forms of oppression which they see as they are able, allowing the Gospel to shape their actions, buying patterns, and interactions so that they form points of light in a world darkened by oppression (Matthew 5.14-16).

THE TEXT

ISAIAH 11.1-9: A NEW LEADER IS COMING

The book of Isaiah is a collection of prophecies spoken by the prophet Isaiah during the eighth-century B.C. These prophecies are stern reminders of coming judgment upon Israel for its apostasy, though hope seems to be held out that Israel might return to God (Isaiah 1.18-19). However, it seems that God knows that his people will refuse him. Therefore, he tells them of his coming judgment. Yet, in the midst of these prophecies of judgment are prophecies of hope. God's coming judgment is not punitive but corrective. God has not abandoned Israel, but he will restore her once more. These prophecies of hope form bits of light to sustain and guide the Israelites through the dark time which was about to descend upon them.

Isaiah 11 is actually the culmination of a prophecy which began in Isaiah 9. It explores the identity of the child foretold in Isaiah 9.6-7. This prophecy begins by stating that a shoot would come up from the stump of Jesse. The reference to the stump indicates the destruction of a tree which symbolizes Israel. Israel would fall and be destroyed, but hope was present because a new tree would spring up. A new Israel would grow and it would grow from the family of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the King whose line God promised would always remain upon the throne (2 Samuel 7.11, 16; Psalm 89.19-20, 28-29). The reference seems to be that this new Israel would be linked to the past but would be separate.

This new Israel would be guided by someone from the line of Jesse (David) and he would be

the rightful leader because the Spirit of the Lord would be upon him. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was not given to all people but to those whom God used to lead and guide his people. Samson had the Spirit upon him (Judges 14.6) as did Saul and David (1 Samuel 10.10; 16.13). This leader would be given leadership abilities through the Holy Spirit to understand God's way (wisdom) and to understand the nature of the world in which he lived (understanding). He would have the ability to know God's law (counsel) and the power to enact it (might). He would have an experiential relationship with God (knowledge) and pursue true worship (fear of the Lord). Unlike the present leaders of Israel (Isaiah 10.1-2), he would be just and upright. He would have the ability to see situations and people below the surface and would use his insight to bring justice for the poor, those most open to abuse. He would speak laws which would bring this justice to his realm and restrain the wicked (rod of his mouth). In fact, the very core of his being, his belt which is his undergarment in the language of the Old Testament, was righteousness.

The resulting kingdom over which he reigned would be one in which oppressor and victim would sit together. Here Isaiah speaks metaphorically of the hunter and prey living together in harmony which represents the wicked (hunter) depriving the poor (prey) of justice. His reign would go so far as to remove all forms of harm from those who could not defend themselves (children) so that his kingdom was completely safe.

The world Isaiah describes looked nothing like the world in which he lived. In his world, Israel was experiencing a heyday. It enjoyed great wealth and influence. However, it was also marked by incredible acts of injustice as the ruling elite class oppressed the poor of the land (Isaiah 10.1-2; Amos 4.1). Many of the prophets from this period noted the oppression present and linked God's coming judgment to the presence of this oppression and called God's people to end the oppression in which they themselves were participating (Isaiah 58). The hope given in this prophecy is that God himself would do what his people would not do. He would move to end oppression and create a kingdom which was safe for all people. Jesus is the incarnate fulfillment of this prophecy (Mark 1.10) and his gospel proclaimed that he was about the fulfillment of this prophecy (Luke 4.18-19).

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

Oppression. It exists all around us. It exists in the clothes we wear, the coffee we drink, the cars we drive, even the lettuce which supports the salad in our latest fad diet. Oppression may have painted our nails or prepared our dinner the last time we ate out. It is hard to breathe and not smell the noxious reek of oppression in our world, and that is the problem. It is everywhere, so much so that it becomes too much to bear, so we shut down. I remember the first time I really paid attention to oppression. I got mad, really mad. How dare someone use children to make my shirt or pick my coffee. How could anyone in their right mind use slaves to make the fuel which helped form the steel for my car? How could I participate in such a broken, abusive system? I was ready to do anything to make it right. That lasted about two weeks and then I realized that I couldn't make it right. Oppression, in one form or another, was impossible to avoid. Its tendrils had so entwined themselves into the economic fabric of our world that any cure would kill the patient. I became overwhelmed. It was hard to go to the grocery store or even buy a new pair of shoes. My friends couldn't stand me because I asked where they bought their coffee. Finally, it just became too hard and I gave up. I intentionally shut down and shut out the oppression all around me. I pretended it didn't exist and that I didn't see it as a matter of pure survival. From time to time I wake up because something is impossible to ignore, but the magnitude of the issue is so great that I simply shut down once more.

When I shut down what I am really saying is that the darkness of oppression wins. The darkness is too strong. It is too great. When I shut down I give up my role as salt in this unseasoned world and light in an oppressive darkness, but I simply don't have the strength to do anything other. The darkness is too great, at least it appears that way until I grasp the hope of Christ. In Christ we have one who is starting the whole thing over again. In him, we have one who is creating a Kingdom which will overcome all other Kingdoms in which oppression has no place. Darkness is not too big. It is not too strong. Its time is limited. As I look up I can see a very different future and it is that future that gives me hope to live differently today, to live that future today.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Oppression is a reality in our world. Human trafficking is at its highest point in the history of mankind. Economic and racial injustice are part and parcel of our daily news cycle. Abuse and subjugation wove the fibers of our clothes and poured the mold for our shoes and perhaps our television components. It is impossible to miss the darkness of oppression which surrounds us which is exactly what we think we must do if we are to survive. We must seek to shut out the darkness of oppression so that we can function, for to see the world as it truly is leads to a form of paralysis, an inability to move because every move in some way is to participate in oppression. However, in this darkness, we have hope. Oppression's time is limited. With the coming of Christ we have the dealing of a death blow to all forms of oppression. The future is not dark but light and joyous. We are just not there yet, but we will be. Because our future is secure, we can choose to live in light of that future in the present. Consider taking steps to really see the world as it is and to weep. Mourn the darkness of oppression in our world and begin praying for the hope which is in Christ. Pray for specific areas such as the human trafficking which supplies many of our nail parlors. As you pray, ask God to move and to lead you to move with him, your small light is an extension of his great and glorious coming light against the darkness of oppression.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

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