

Justice

Justice is, of course, a major theme in the Bible and especially so because we are constantly reminded that justice (righteousness) is an attribute of God's own self (eg Isaiah 45: 20ff). Yet because of this strong identification between God and the source of all justice, people can sometimes think that God alone deals in justice and so the failures of God to see that the good prosper and the bad are punished leads to a feeling that there is a deep and prevailing unfairness in the world, a point that Jesus alludes to in Matthew 5:45. But the Bible continually makes clear that it is *our* responsibility to see that a justice which makes sense to everybody is woven into the fabric of all our social relations. This is what Jesus was saying forcibly to his audience in Matthew 5: justice flows from love, - not merely for the people we find it easy to love, but for the ones for whom we cannot find room in our hearts.

We see this responsibility in many biblical stories. The test of this justice is an outcome of salvation. For example, Abraham argues with God over the fate of Sodom in Genesis 18ff. The result is the saving of Lot. More strikingly we see it in the famous "judgement of Solomon" (1 Kings 16ff) where just action results from eliciting where love lies from the maelstrom of jealousy, anger, rivalry and bitterness. Love decides the judgement and an innocent human being is saved.



Love and salvation override cold, black and white understandings of what is "fair". Parables such as the labourers in the vineyard and the prodigal son don't seem "fair", but love demands that justice takes place in another way. The father loves his sons equally, no matter what. The employer rewards his employees equally.

This twinning of the concept of justice with love and salvation generates hope for each of us. For, if God's nature is justice, what can we expect as judgement? For we have all failed, not least in loving our neighbour as ourselves. Sometimes the task seems simply too great. But God's own son stepped into a vast failure of justice: betrayal, compromise, indifference, torture, defeat and death, even the absence of the loving Father, yet Jesus, resurrected, turned all these failings around into an outpouring of faith, hope and love. Justice flows from a love that *cannot* be overcome by human evil and this gives Christian faith its transformative properties. The challenge to show this love and deliver this justice falls on all of us who call ourselves Christian.