



## A BIBLICAL STUDY RESOURCE

### HOUSING SUPPORT CRISIS RESPONSE REPORT JULY 2022

#### **Bible verses**

**Mark 12:38–44**

#### **Context**

The housing crisis in New Zealand has seen levels of homelessness and poverty that many New Zealanders have not previously experienced. It expresses itself in people's increased dependence on foodbanks, motels, emergency and transitional housing. High rents lead to debt, food insecurity, unstable living conditions and high levels of child poverty.

It is nearly four years since The Salvation Army's *Beyond Renting* report looked at the crisis in renting and described the 'Matthew effect' in housing in this country (see that report [here](#)). It is a term drawing from a biblical reference to Matthew 13:12 that says for those who have, more will be given, and those without will lose what little they have. Sociologist Robert Merton used the term to describe how in some social systems initial advantages accumulate through time.

This is one of the dynamics of inequality. Where wealth accumulates, it becomes easier to add further wealth. Wealth is passed on down generations; networks of privilege make access to finance and investment opportunities easier. Those who have more, receive even more. In contrast, those who have little live in constant risk of losing everything, struggle to gain a foothold on the path to economic resilience and are labelled as a burden (on 'society' or the 'tax payer').

There are a range of perspectives on housing reflected in the Bible, and this study looks at one perspective. Another report—*Pasifika Housing*—draws on concepts of home and place. The Housing Support paper is about responding to the dynamics of accumulated advantage. The **Housing Support Crisis Response** report looks at the current crisis and associated poverty, and proposes a way forward by way of reviewing the Accommodation Supplement to make it possible for low-income families to afford the unaffordable levels of rent that currently exist.

In the biblical context of the people of Israel returning from exile to Palestine around 500 BC, the prophet Zechariah sees a vision of the kingdom of God (focussed on the people of Israel in his time), where it included a place or land to belong and reside in. He says, "In that day each of you will invite your neighbour to sit under your vine and fig tree", declares the Lord Almighty' (Zechariah 3:10). This is in essence a place to call home. This is a theme found in other Bible verses (2 Kings 18:31; Isaiah 36:16).

**Have a read of the ‘Housing Support Crisis Response’ [report \(link here\)](#), the associated scriptural references and commentary below and then discuss or reflect on the questions at the end**

**Read Mark 12:38–44**

Consider that according to the Law of Moses, the spiritual leaders were supposed to be taking care of the widows and orphans in the community and providing for their needs (Deuteronomy 26:12).

Another reading in Mark 7:10–13 gives an example of how the religious leaders appear to be working the system to their advantage.

**Reflect on these verses and consider the following questions:**

Is Jesus saying those in political and religious authority are taking from poor widows and not giving back as they should, but exploiting a religious pretext so they can serve their own financial advancement, which results in widows losing their homes, (‘They devour widows’ houses’)?

**Further questions:**

- What critique was Jesus making of the political and religious system, and leaders of the day?
- Where were the money and resources going to and away from?
- How does this state of affairs 2000 years ago relate to the housing crisis today?
- What do you think of the description of the housing situation in New Zealand as ‘a catastrophe’?
- Do you see housing as a ‘right’ (as the report promotes), or as a commodity? What role does the community and government play in upholding this ‘right’?
- What do you think of the statement in the report called the ‘Matthew Effect Turbocharged’?
- What do you think of the specific areas for action on page 7?

**Further biblical/theological reflection**

See the link to a 2019 [The Housing Crisis Facing Pasifika People in Aotearoa](#) report, by Ronji Tanielu, and for his thoughts about the question: **Is there any such thing as a theology of housing?**

See also the 2018 [Beyond Renting](#) report by Alan Johnson which refers to the Mathew effect in relation to housing.

**You might like to close off this time of reflection with a prayer for the housing crisis—your own or one of those provided below.**

Dear God,

*Watch over your children, especially those with no homes to return to at the end of long and weary days. Protect them from all harm and keep them from despair. Open the hearts and eyes of those of us with blessings to share. Unite our voices in a call for justice: so that no man need ever lay down for the night on a wooden park bench because he has no home; so that no woman need ever tuck her children into the back seat of her car because she has no home; so that no child need ever wonder, ‘Where will I feel safe?’ because he has no home; so that all those who wander and all who are in need find the shelter and the peace they seek. Remind us, O God, that we cannot rest fully secure in our homes each night until all your children are, at last, home. Amen.*

–Andrea Goldstein

Father God,

In you we find our rest. We pray for the many families who are struggling to bear the cost of housing. Help them go beyond choosing between food, heating or paying the rent. To get beyond surviving one day at a time trying to feed the children, working out where the next dollar is going to come from and the intense anxiety that goes with these seemingly impossible demands. Dear Jesus, we pray that we as a society would ensure that everyone has enough to pay for a warm dry roof over their head and food on the table. We pray that our country would be a place where people thrive—a country that provides ‘life’, not merely survival. Help our government and communities to make the kind of social policies that enable all people to thrive.

In Jesus’ name we ask it.

Amen.



Te Ope Whakaora

## Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit

Working for the eradication of poverty in New Zealand

*Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of facts and information in this report. Inaccuracies or errors in interpretation remain ours and we are happy to discuss any brought to our attention. The views are the authors', expressed in the name of The Salvation Army, Te Ope Whakaora.*

***We welcome your comments.***

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