

Justice - God's Perfect Justice

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- [0 : 0 0] They were the words of one of the parents who lost their daughter when the balcony collapsed. Justice must prevail, cried the campaigner seeking the protection and equal rights of women in Afghanistan.
- Whoever we are, we all have this sense of what is just and fair, and nothing angers us more when injustice goes unpunished and the victims continue to suffer.
- We've all experienced it in our lives and we can all see it. It's not fair that the richest 60 people in the world have more wealth than the combined wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion. That's half of the world's population. It's wrong that the slaughter of innocent people at the hands of ISIS continues, the beheadings of men, the rape and mutilation of women, the taking of children as sex slaves.
- It's not right that gang lords walk our streets exploiting the vulnerable and terrorising neighbourhoods. It's complete savagery that Boko Haram are kidnapping children and using them as suicide bombers, because no one will suspect them.
- [1 : 3 1] It's not fair that men and women and children are being washed up on the shores of Greece as they seek safety for their families. It's not right that nearly half a million people, the most needy of our nation, are waiting an appointment to see a consultant or a surgeon.
- You see, we all know what it is to experience and see injustice. And whatever we believe, we all want justice to be done.
- Well, the story of the Bible tells us of a God who loves and desires justice to be done. Psalm 146 reminds us of who God is.
- It tells us that he executes justice for the oppressed and he gives food for the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free. The Lord gives sight to the blind.
- He lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves those who live justly. The Lord watches over the immigrant and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- [2 : 5 2] This is our great God. And God so loves justice that he demands that his people also act justly.
- So throughout the story, as God worked with his people, and as they were rescued from Egypt, from slavery, unjustly, they were brought out of that and brought into a new land, and God gave them laws reflecting his character and how they should live.
- And this is what he said to them. If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your brother or sister.
- Rather be open-handed and freely lend them whatever they need. And cursed be anyone who withholds the justice that is due to the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow.
- And all the people shall say, Amen. In fact, one of the main roles of the prophets was to remind God's people of how they should live as God's people in God's world.

[4 : 08] From Micah, the prophet spoke to the people. He says, He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly. To love mercy. And to walk humbly with your God. You see, to act justly.

Or to do justice in the world. Essentially means two things. On the one hand, justice is about punishment. It's about correcting wrongs and making sure people receive the penalty for their crime.

But on the other hand, justice is also about protection. It's about giving people their rights. And making sure that people are treated fairly. And given the respect that is due to them.

You see, God's laws for his people was actually a reflection of his own heart and character of the way in which the world should be. In fact, God promised that one day, he would bring about this kind of justice to all nations of the world.

[5 : 22] And here we turn to Isaiah, chapter 42. Let's read chapter 42, verse 1 together. This is a prophecy looking forward to the coming of God's servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would come and bring justice.

Verse 1. And here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. He will not be a bully or he will not oppress people. Verse 3.

A bruised reed he will not break. In other words, he will not crush those who are weak. A smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

He will not destroy the needy. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.

[6 : 33] You see, nothing and no one is going to stand in God's way. God will not rest until justice is done.

All wrongs will be punished. The vulnerable will be protected. God, since Adam and Eve fell and the curse came upon the world, God is intent on renewing and restoring and making everything right and putting things back together the way they should be.

Well, if that is what God has promised, if God has promised to bring justice, then where is justice?

You see, God has promised to renew and restore. But nothing, it seems, seems to be happening. This is the struggle that we find throughout the story of the whole Bible.

Listen to the cries of the Psalms, the writers, as they come to terms with the reality of living life in a world where there is so much injustice. My soul is in anguish.

[7 : 56] How long, O Lord? How long? How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

How long will the wicked, O Lord? How long will the wicked be jubilant? How long must your servant wait?

When will you punish my persecutors? Now isn't that your cry? Isn't that your experience in life?

You work hard for your employer. You do everything that's right, but then you watch as the lazy and the cheats get a pay rise. Where's the justice in that?

[8 : 58] Someone has wronged you and every time you see them it's a reminder that they got away. It's as if they're sneering and laughing at you. Where's the justice in that?

We turn on the news and watch as another bomb goes off and more lives are lost and we wonder, what is God doing? How long till you put it all right?

You see, these are the normal questions of Christians as we live on the one hand with God's promise of justice, but then the reality of injustice.

And there's this tension. God says, I'm going to put everything right, but our experience in life is that nothing seems to be right. That was certainly the experience of the prophet Habakkuk as he sees his own people being oppressed by an invading nation.

Have a look at Habakkuk chapter 1. It's one of those books that are there, but we find hard to find. It's on page 490, I think, if you're using a red-covered Bible.

[10 : 11] Sorry? Oh, sorry, 940. 940. Habakkuk chapter 1. So here's a man called by God, a prophet, to speak into the people in their situation.

He knows of God's promise of justice, but yet his experience in life is one of injustice. page 940, Habakkuk chapter 1.

Let's pick it up in verse 2. How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen, or cry out to you, violence, but you do not save.

Have you not heard, God, the cries of those 270 girls that were kidnapped by Boko Haram, or the 1,000 other children who've been snatched on their way to school?

Have you not heard their cries at night as they long for their parents? Verse 3. Why do you make me look at injustice?

[11 : 31] Why do you tolerate wrong? God, do you not know about the 23 million people who are suffering to the point of sickness and starvation in that evil and cruel state of North Korea?

Can you not see what's going on? Verse 3. Destruction and violence are before me.

There is strife and conflict abounds. Do you not care about that innocent man? This past week, that father of three, struggling with his drug addiction, then being shot in the face and killed?

Do you not care about these things? Verse 4. Therefore the law is paralysed and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted. How long? How long, O Lord, till you deliver on that promise to renew and restore this disordered world and our broken lives?

[12 : 47] Or is this just some big sick joke and you're just leading us up the narrow path to a dead end? God has answered.

God has answered in time and in history in three ways. First, justice has been done at the cross.

You see, when Jesus came and moved into this world, he moved into a world of injustice. He wasn't immune to the suffering.

He was a man who suffered unjustly. Jesus was innocent of any crime. He was without sin, but yet he was beaten, whipped, crushed, broken, crucified on a wooden cross.

But Jesus' death was so much more than just identifying with the injustices of the world. His death was our substitution.

[14 : 00] Go with me, please, to Luke's Gospel, chapter 23. Luke's Gospel, chapter 23. In Luke 23, we have the account of Jesus dying on the cross.

His execution. And as Jesus was crucified, you remember that he was crucified with two criminals, one on either side.

And we pick it up in verse 39. So we picture there this innocent one crucified on the cross. Verse 39, and one of the criminals who hung there hurled their insults at him.

Aren't you the Christ? Well, save yourself and us. But the other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence?

We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.

[15 : 14] You see, in the history of the world, there is only one who is truly innocent. That is the God-man who hung on the cross.

We might not be responsible for acts of terrorism. We might not have siphoned off taxpayers' money into our own personal accounts. but each one of us has acted unjustly towards others.

Our words, my words, have hurt the innocent. Our greed, my greed, has caused needy people to suffer.

You see, if justice is to be done, if we want God to bring his justice, justice, then we too deserve to be punished.

If we want God to come right now and correct all wrongs and put everything right, then that means God must not just deal with the world, he must deal with me. Why should I be excluded and stand apart from it all and be let off the hook?

[16 : 30] Well, in history, God has come in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into this world to be our substitute and he was treated as you and I deserve to be treated because Jesus came and took all our acts of injustice on himself and so the justice of God falls not on us but it falls on his son on the cross who takes the blame for all that we have done wrong.

verse 42 this is criminal he says to Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus answered him I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise you see when we fall in dependence upon God when we acknowledge our guilt when we trust in Christ alone we can be forgiven of all of our sin we are welcomed as that criminal was into paradise itself the new creation where justice reigns and where peace rules justice is done at the cross well justice has been done at the cross and justice is being done through the church you see when we turn independence to Christ he doesn't just leave us as we are he transforms us into the kind of people who begin to live and act justly the church is to be a place where we speak up for the oppressed where we give a voice to the unborn who provide for those who have suffered injustices have a look at Acts chapter 2 here we get this wonderful picture of the church and how it should operate a people of justice

Acts chapter 2 and verse 44 so chapter 2 verse 44 all the believers were together and had everything in common selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as they had need this is a picture of God's new people the church those who have been changed by God now begin to reflect the very character of God to others they look out for the most vulnerable the weak and the poor they look out for those who have suffered injustice in fact those who have much have a very special responsibility have a look at chapter 4 and verse 34 again we have a picture of what the church should be as the believers met together look at verse 34 there were no needy persons among them for from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet and it was distributed to anyone as he had need you see the needy today is the refugee who is fleeing from Syria it's the homeless person which includes those who are living in emergency accommodation it's a single mum who's suffering abuse at the hands of her so-called lovers it's the father who's having to work three jobs trying to make ends meet it's the immigrant who can't speak

English and needs help and support if we are people who've experienced the grace of God where the justice of God has not fallen on us but upon his son so that we can be forgiven if that is our experience we will be a people who are seeking justice in the lives of those who are most needy instead of crying out what is God doing what are God's people doing one of the ways we seek to do that as a church is through what we call ministries of mercy we have a financial fund to provide for the practical and social needs of other people in some way to reflect the character of God to those who do not yet know God so God's plan is not that justice has been done on the cross but justice is being done through his people the church but there's a third way justice will be done when Jesus returns have a look at Revelation chapter 6

Revelation chapter 6 Revelation is this spectacular vision of what is going to happen in the end if you want to know how the history of the world the story is going to reach its conclusion read Revelation but it's full of imagery and symbolism so we don't take everything literally it's got full of vibrant colours and pictures to help us see and at the heart of this vision comes this question in Revelation chapter 6 and verse 10 Revelation chapter 6 verse 10 there's a question that is being raised by God's people as they look out on the world and see the injustice that is going on do you see what it says there in verse 10 they called out in a loud voice how long sovereign

[23 : 08] Lord holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood how long is it going to be till you bring justice to those who are suffering injustice well as we read through the conclusion of the story we're not told a day or a date but we are simply told that justice will come and we are given a picture of what it will look like have a look at Revelation chapter 19 Revelation 19 we have this incredible picture we need to engage our minds here in this to picture it this is what it will be like when the risen

Lord Jesus returns in all his glory and all his power and will fulfill the promise to bring justice upon all peoples and all nations let me read from verse 11 so picture this scene standing as it were if we're looking up to the sky I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse a white horse being a symbol of the purity of the one who is to come the rider is called faithful and true faithful to all his promises throughout time to renew this broken world and restore disordered lives he is true he is going to expose every single wrong nothing will be kept hidden everything will be shown for what it is with justice he judges and makes war his eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns here is one with absolute power and supreme authority over all things and over all people he has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself in other words nobody can comprehend his awesome rule and power you cannot confine him to a mere name you cannot squish him down into a box that you can manage he is bigger and beyond and greater than all things verse 13 he is dressed in a robe dripped in blood because this faithful and true rider on his white horse is nothing less than the crucified

Jesus whose blood was shed for you and for me and now he comes in victory and in power his name is the word of God verse 14 the armies of heaven were following him riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen white and clean the armies are not just the armies all the angels but God's people those who have trusted in him will be with him as he rides in victory with power and authority and they will be behind him on their horses coming to bring justice verse 15 out of his mouth comes a sharp sword and with it to which he will strike down the nations he will rule them with an iron scepter because with his word he will execute justice punishing wrong and protecting the weak he treads the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God almighty just as those in days gone past would have gone out to the vineyard and collected the grapes and brought it back into the big vat and they would put all the grapes there and then the servants would come and they would trample on the grapes squeezing the juice out of them until it ran below into the vats underneath well in this image in this picture we see

God gathering the nations of the world and as it were he treads and he crushes upon them bringing his justice to all who have defied him and not one will escape justice will be done verse 16 and on his robe and on his thigh he has his name written the king of kings and the lord of lords just as God had promised that a saviour would come and that saviour did come so God has promised to you and me that one day his judge the risen Jesus is going to come Jesus the risen king will come and execute justice upon all peoples and all nations how will we stand before this king of kings and lord of lords when he comes the only place for us to stand is to stand under the cross where justice has been done where we take refuge where the justice of

God has fallen on his son instead of you and me so that we can look forward to a new heavens and a new earth where everything is put right not because we deserve it but because of his grace and his mercy justice will be done let's pray or pray on