

For the Glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] . Friends, the world that we live in in our current day is a world full of corruption.

We know this. It's paraded before us every day. It is a world full of personal corruption, social corruption, environmental corruption, relational corruption, and such corruption is really paraded before us every day of our lives.

And rightfully, in many ways, contemporary Christians see this parade and they long for justice. They yearn for this world to be set right, for injustice to be overturned, and for righteousness and justice to settle upon this corrupt world.

Now, those concerns are reflected in all areas of life. They're particularly concentrated on issues of social justice. And so many contemporary Christians increasingly advocate for such issues as the end of slavery, the end of poverty, the distribution of wealth, combat against modern slavery, the critique of systematic and coercive power structures, the end of human abuse of the environment. Friends, many modern Christians are very concerned about justice. And a concern for justice is an honourable, a good, and a godly concern.

[1 : 22] But of course, we need to ask, what exactly is justice? What does it mean to be just? And how is God connected with justice? What does it mean for us to call for justice?

What does justice look like? Now, let me say in a roundabout way that I think this is the central theme of today's passage. It is a passage about justice and about the God of justice.

So, before we get underway, it's appropriate for us to quickly survey some of what the Bible has to say. Now, I want to do that. I want to spend a few minutes thinking about the concept of justice in the Bible. Now, as I do so, I want to tell you that I'm treading on very controversial soil as I do this. You see, scholars have fiercely debated some of the concepts I'm going to talk about, but I need to clear the ground just a bit for us so that we've got some place to work when we get to one, two Thessalonians.

So, I want you to pick up your Bibles with me and look at some key passages. And really, I could have chosen so many, but I've only chosen two. I want you to look at Leviticus chapter 19, verse 36.

[2 : 25] Now, if you're looking for Leviticus, you just start at the beginning of your Bibles and you keep going and before long you get there. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. And it's not hard to find. And then you just look for 19.

If you really need a page number, which you shouldn't, it's 94. So, I want to read Leviticus 19, verse 36.

Now, I need to tell you that in the original language, although in verse 36 the word honest is used in our English translations, I suspect it's a bit better to translate it just. And I'm going to do that and I want you to hear what it says.

From verse 35. You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hymn.

They're measurements of, measurements in the ancient world. I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Now, I wonder if you can get the sense of what's happening here. You see, can you see what's happening?

[3 : 28] You're saying, justice is about having proper standards and keeping to them. It's about not cheating. It's about integrity. It's about having scales that don't cheat. It's about treating people rightly.

Now, with that in mind, now turn a few pages further on to Deuteronomy chapter 32. So keep going past numbers into Deuteronomy chapter 32.

And again, if you're looking for a page number, it's 165. And Moses is talking about God and talking about God as the rock.

And I want you to notice what he says in verse 4. The rock, his work is perfect and all his ways are just. A faithful God without deceit.

Just and upright is he. Yet his degenerate children have dealt falsely with him. A perverse and crooked generation. Now, I wonder if you noticed all the words that are linked positively together.

[4 : 27] There is rock, just, perfect, faithful, without deceit, upright. And did you notice the words that are contrasted with God's character? You see, God's children are not just.

No, instead, they deal falsely. They are perverse. They are crooked. So when you put these sort of pictures together, what do you get? This is a picture of justice that is emerging, isn't it?

Justice is what matches what God thinks is proper and right. God's will. It conforms to God's desire for his world. It's that which matches his character.

It is that which acts in harmony with his standards. It is that which puts God's standards into action in a real world. Justice is something, you see, associated with God.

You see, God cannot fail at justice and still be God. It is part of who he is. To take away justice is to take away his character.

[5 : 25] He is a God who is the rock of justice. That is, of regularity, of integrity, of reliability. He is, if you like, God the just.

And the saints in the book of Revelation, chapter 15, verse 3, celebrate this. They say, just and true are your ways, king of the nations.

Now, with that in mind, I want you to think about justice just a little more. If God is indeed justice, or is indeed just, then he must do justice, mustn't he?

And doing justice, when you think about it, has both a positive and a negative side to it, doesn't it? I mean, doing justice positively means doing that which is right. But it also means, doesn't it, inevitably correcting that which is wrong.

It is therefore inevitably tied up with judgment. Making sure that justice is done has a corollary, a necessary corollary. If you are making sure that justice is done, then you must, at the same time, make sure that injustice is prevented or dealt with.

[6 : 33] Justice cannot be done unless injustice is done away with. And making sure that injustice is done away with inevitably means judgment of injustice.

I wonder if you can see this. You see, I think that this element is often neglected when contemporary Christians talk about justice. They want all the bad things to be fixed up without the negative elements associated with fixing them.

Judgment, you see, is not in and of itself evil. Judgment is a necessary expression of goodness. A society or a person which has power but which does not punish evil is not a just society or a just person.

Imagine you have a grandchild or a child and that person is abused in one way or another or treated or perhaps someone is drunk and driving a car and does damage.

You would not want a society that did not deal with the person that acted in that abuse, would you? To do so would be an unjust society. Now, a society which does not punish evil is not a just society.

[7 : 45] A person that does not punish evil is not a just person. Such a thing would be evil and terrifying. You see, justice demands judgment or punishment.

It demands this. And so, when God judges, He is acting to do this, to restore His holy order. He is acting to restore justice.

He is acting to glorify His name. His institution of justice, which often takes the shape of judgment, is good in and of itself. It is good for the world because it puts things back the way they were meant to be.

Now, friends, with that in mind, we've done some background for this passage. It was necessary to do this. Let's now have a look at our passage. And I want you to store what we've done up in the back of your brains because I'm going to drag it out later on, hopefully.

So, turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Now, you may remember that I started my ministry here at Holy Trinity by working through 1 Thessalonians.

[8 : 45] Well, we're going to have a look at the follow-on from 1 Thessalonians, this one. And let me give you a start by giving you an overview of this chapter. In verses 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul greets the people in the church of Thessalonica.

And in verse 3, he begins to thank God. And that thanksgiving extends all the way through to verse 10. And then in verses 11 and 12, he turns to prayer. And he tells his Christian friends what it is that he's praying for in relation to them.

So, there's an outline, a greeting, 1 and 2, a thanksgiving, 3 to 10, and a prayer, verses 11 and 12. Now, let's have a look at the detail. Verse 1 is a little unusual.

Did you notice that? Have a look at it and see if you can spot what's unusual. It's a little unusual in that Paul doesn't give any title for himself. You see, he's not Paul the Apostle.

He's not Paul, the one appointed by God. He's just Paul. And Silvanus, well, he's just Silvanus. That's normal. And Timothy, well, he's not Timothy, the beloved brother, or Timothy, the fellow servant of Christ, as he is elsewhere in Paul's introductions.

[9 : 50] No, these three men are just Paul, Silvanus, Timothy. And the Christians that are introduced are also introduced in relatively plain terms. They are the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the word church, it's unfortunate we translate it church here because it just means a gathering. That's the way it was used in the ancient world. It's simply a Greek word for a gathering. So, there are lots of gatherings that occurred in Thessalonica and this is one of them. But this one was special. It's a special gathering in that it's a gathering of Thessalonians.

How? In God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are a distinct group of people. They share a common bond. They are in God who is their Father.

They are in Jesus the Messiah, the Christ who is their Lord. This is who they are. And Paul conveys this very Christian greeting and wishes to them.

[10 : 48] He says, he wishes them God's reconciling peace and God's grace, his overwhelming mercy and kindness. And all of this, he says, is from your Father who is God and your shared Lord who is Jesus the Messiah, the Christ.

And then comes verse 3. Now verse 3 launches Paul off into this extended and intricate thanksgiving and look at your English versions and they've put this line in.

They've put a heading in, haven't they, around about verse 4, after verse 4. It shouldn't be there.

This is one long sentence in the original language. It runs from verse 3 all the way through to verse 10.

And it begins there and it's long and it's intricate and it's extended. Now I wonder if you can follow the logic with me. See if you can work your way through it with me. Paul begins in verse 3 by telling the Thessalonian Christians that he thanks God for them.

You see, in one Thessalonians he remembered that they turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. And he remarked there on the fact that the message of the Gospel came to them not only in words but in power and the Holy Spirit, full conviction, and that faith has not remained static.

[12 : 04] Can you see it here? How has it changed? That faith that was initially turning away from idols to the true God, how has it changed here? Well, Paul says it's a faith that's growing abundantly.

And its outcome is also growing. You see, their love for each other is increasing. They are full of growing faith and increasing love. They are developing as Christians and he loves it.

And so, he boasts about it. Look at him. He says, he finds this an item of boasting. He says, it's as though he's going around the Mediterranean or wherever saying, look at those Thessalonians.

Look at them. They are growing in love and in faith. And it's abundant and overflowing. And do you know what? It's happening despite severe persecution and affliction.

And that brings us to verse 5. And he uses the word this. And I think he's probably referring to their steadfastness. In other words, I think he's saying something like this. This, i.e.

[13 : 06] your steadfastness and faith is evidence of the righteous judgment of God. Now, the word righteous is the same in Greek as the word just. In other words, Paul is saying your steadfastness and faith that which you have is evidence of the just judgment of God.

And God's judgment has an intention. God's judgment is intended to make Christians worthy of the kingdom of God for which they're suffering. So God's justice has a primary focus here.

It's to prepare Christians. When God is judging in his world, part of its impact is to prepare Christians for the kingdom for which they are suffering. But it has a secondary focus. Can you see it there in verse 6?

Paul talks about the justice of God again. And this time, can you see who it's directed towards? The perpetrators of injustice. And what he says is the just God will repay with affliction those who are inflicting his children.

The just God will give relief to those same children and he'll do it. When? On the day the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven. You see, in 1 Thessalonians, these early Christians were waiting in eager anticipation for the vindication and the second coming of Jesus.

[14 : 28] They knew it would be rescue. They knew it would be a day of great exaltation. And now Paul talks to them more about this second coming. And he really says there'll be a flip side to it.

He makes clear that they understand that the second coming of Jesus will not just be about the righting of wrongs. Jesus will come again. But when he comes it will come in judgment.

There will be angels. There will be flaming fire. There will be the inflicting of vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is not just a vindictive person. No, he's setting things right again. Does that make sense? He's setting things right the way they should be. Justice does not only mean righting wrong.

It also means judging those who perpetrate such wrong. It means punishing rebels and ignorers of him. Such rebels and ignorers will suffer punishment and that punishment will be eternal destruction.

[15 : 39] The one they did not know will now be known. The gospel they did not obey will be sourced to the Lord Jesus Christ and they will be barred from his presence whom they resisted.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction. They'll be separated from the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and from the glory of his might. They wanted nothing to do with him so they'll be separated from him but not God's faithful people.

now those who knew him and his son will be caught up in wonder. Can you hear the contrast? They will glorify the just God. They will marvel at him for they believed.

They had faith. They persevered. They remained steadfast and on that great day they will soak up his presence in marvelous wonder.

And for those who knew him and obeyed the gospel there will be another justice. And this is Paul's thanksgiving. Can you see what's happening here?

[16 : 44] He begins with thanks for what God has done in the lives of these Christians and where does he end at the end of his thanksgiving? With glory and wonder as they soak up the presence of the just God who punishes wickedness and rewards faith and steadfastness.

Friends please understand and grasp the theology here. It's very important that we do this. You see this thanksgiving has at its heart those references to the justice of God. Our God is God the just.

A just God is the only hope this world has. But the concept of a just God has two sides to it. On the one hand a just God will mean that he will exalt and vindicate justice and right.

He will also exalt and vindicate those who have lined up with his purposes of justice and righteousness. But on the other hand a just God will also end injustice and the ending of injustice does not just mean the ending of poverty.

Friends it means far more than that. It does not just mean the ending of slavery although it will. It does not simply mean putting the world back into shape. No friends ending injustice means punishing the perpetrators as well.

[17 : 59] and the ultimate perpetrators are those who have failed to hear his word and who have ignored him and who do not know him and who have not obeyed the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends underneath the sins and injustice of our world there lies an awful sin. it is the sin of failing to know God.

It is the sin of failing to hear his word paraded in our gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which has gone out to all corners of this world. And that is why the focus of Christians and please hear me on this, the focus of Christians is not predominantly on fixing injustice but it is on proclaiming the gospel in a world where God the just will execute justice.

It is only the knowledge of Jesus that will put people on the right side of God. It is only obedience to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that will put people on the right side of God.

It is no good having people emancipated from slavery but not believing in Jesus. That is why Paul preaches the gospel.

[19 : 19] And that is what fuels his prayers for those he has ministered to. Look at verses 11 and 12. Since Jesus alone will determine their destiny he prays that God will make them worthy of this call they have in Jesus.

That God will be powerfully at work with them to fulfil every good resolve and work of faith. And this is the one goal in mind that the name of the Lord Jesus might be glorified in them and they in him because when he comes it will be all him.

And this will only happen you see though with God through God being gracious and so he ends as he began. Did you notice that? He ends with God who earlier on we heard was the Father and he ends with the Lord Jesus the Christ.

Friends let's learn from this passage today. You see we learn we live in a Christian world that is so politically correct. It rightly desires justice.

It rightly perceives that God desires justice. It rightly feels and wants to enter into the world of those who are denied justice. It rightly sides with them.

[20 : 30] It rightly understands the heart of God and wants to line up with him. It reflects his heart. However we also live in a world where political correctness denies that justice means judgment.

But a God who is just but does not judge is not a true God. A God who is just but does not punish wickedness is not a God you want to worship in the end.

A Christian faith which denies that there is a judgment where we and the world must give an account to God, to the God of all the earth, is not a Christian faith. And a God who is passionate about justice but not passionate about judgment is not a just God.

but there's more. A Christian faith that is passionate about justice but not passionate about the gospel and its proclamation is ultimately I think not Christian. You see God's great justice and love is displayed primarily in the fact that he allows his son to take the punishment and penalty we deserve.

Through this act in fact he is just but he's also the justifier of him who believes in it. God's great word to his world and to believe this is to believe him.

[21 : 44] To side with this is to side with him and it's to line up with him and his purposes and the destiny of all humanity is tied up with whether or not they line up with this or not.

Finally friends I want to remind you of what it was you were converted to. If you are Christian this is what you became Christian to. Paul has made it clear in 1 Thessalonians where he said you turned from idols to serve a living and true God.

We turned from a fruitless existence to fix our eyes on the future. We were converted to wait for God's son from heaven Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.

So we wait for this. Now friends I need to say that in our safe lives here in middle class Australia that is a nice doctrine.

But this passage shows the other side of it doesn't it? This passage with all its threats of judgment and justice seems a little out of place in our comfortable world.

[22 : 51] But let me say that this passage that we are reading today is not out of place for many of our brothers and sisters around the world this day. this day our sisters and brothers in Christ around the world are faced with real persecutors, real affliction, real instruments of torture, real danger, real threats to their lives and their faith and the lives of their children and the faith of their children.

They long for the day when their pain will be ended and they might marvel at the Lord in the safety of his presence away from their persecutors.

Friends, in our comfort here let us not forget these our brothers and sisters. Pray for them. This passage is directed towards people like them. Pray for them. Ask God that he might make them worthy of their calling.

Urge him to have mercy on them. Advocate for these our sisters and brothers. Give generously toward their support and pray, pray, pray for justice for them.

But friends, if you do realise what you're praying for. Praying for true justice ultimately means the coming of Jesus. And that's what's meant when you pray your kingdom come, your will be done.

[24 : 21] It's not a comfortable prayer, let me tell you. it is a prayer for God to come, to come in his son, to bring the end.

It is a prayer for justice and its corollary judgment. And when this day comes there will be relief and the end of affliction for our brethren.

But it will mean judgment for those who afflict them. So pray that God will turn the hearts of their oppressors. Pray that the gospel might continue to go forth into our world or into God's world. And pray that God might turn people to repentance, that he might continue to be long suffering. Pray that he might turn them to the faith in the Lord Jesus and to the obedience of the gospel. For that is their only hope. So let us pray. Father we pray your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[25 : 37] Father we thank you at the same time that you are long suffering not wanting any to perish but all to turn to repentance. So Father on the one hand we want to say come Lord Jesus but on the other we want to say hold off that more might come to know you.

Father particularly today for we know not how to pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer. We pray this day that you would be near to them, that you would give them relief. Please help us to advocate for them.

Please help us to pray for them. Please this day be near them. And please Father bring about a day of relief for them in whatever shape it will take.

And Father we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.