

Why We Long for Justice?

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[0 : 00] Good evening everyone, as Aaron said, I'm Ian. It's great to see such a full hall here this evening.! Before I start, perhaps I can just remind you there's a prayer meeting on Tuesday evening for Danny at 8 o'clock on Zoom.

Be great if as many as possible can come to that. It'll be the normal church prayer meeting link or it'll be in the weekly email tomorrow. Great to see a good number at that. So our subject this evening is, have you ever wondered why we long for justice?

Honest answer, no I hadn't. I have now. But being a bit contrary, my first thought was, well do we really long for justice? And I've not really been able to get that out of my mind. I want to talk a little bit about that to begin with.

We will come on to our main subject and in case you're worried, we will read from the Bible. Being unconvinced from a game will be doing it at the end rather than at the beginning. So I want to begin by just thinking, do we long for justice?

Remember Sunday is probably quite a good day to think about that. Because most wars are fights for justice on one side or sometimes both sides think they're fighting for justice.

[1 : 10] So the Second World War is a prime example of that. Britain went to war to prevent Hitler rampaging across Europe and to try to stop the murder of millions and millions of Jews and others.

It was what people would see was a just war fighting for justice. Many people gave their lives for that. And as a nation we are really thankful to God for that.

It was a war. It fought for justice. We saw that something was wrong that needed to be put right.

And the country as a whole, many other countries were willing to fight for it to achieve justice.

Perhaps if we look around too we can see some justification for saying we long for justice. We look at the Windrush generation who came from the West Indies. And if we see how terribly they were treated by many people in authority, then we can say they deserve justice.

Or the sub-postmaster and post-mistresses who were wrongly accused of fraud. Some of them sent to prison. Their lives turned upside down. We look at that and say there's a grave injustice there.

[2 : 23] There must be justice for them. And probably going beyond that, someone needs to be held to account for the injustice. There we go.

But at the most basic level, if you have a child and something's gone wrong and they're not happy, they'll shout out, that's not fair. They may not have learned what justice is, but they look around and see, someone's done something that's wrong to me.

It's not fair. It needs to be sorted out. And that suggests there is an instinct in all of us that wrong should be righted. And as I said, that those who have done wrong should be held to account.

Justice satisfies a deep human need for moral order, that good should be rewarded, and that wrongs should be set right. So why am I questioning whether we long for justice?

Justice. Well, there are two reasons. One is that what seems just to me may seem unjust to you. If I'm going for justice, you may say, actually, that is unjust.

[3 : 33] I'll give you an example from my youth. The war that Britain was involved in when I was in my early 20s was the Falklands War. The Falklands War came about because in Argentina there was a deeply held grievance that an island that was quite close to them was ruled by a country that was thousands of miles away.

And there was some political maneuvering by the president to gain popularity in it, but it did reflect a deeply held view in Argentina that there was injustice, that the Malvinas, as they called them, were held by Britain.

Come to our side of it, and when Argentina invaded the Falklands, we said that is unjust. The people who live in the Falklands should have the right to self-determination.

They should be able to decide which country they belong to. Different perspectives, both firmly held, both saying we want justice, but coming to the opposite conclusion.

Another example, a bit closer to us. There are many people who feel that justice can only be achieved if a woman has a right over what is in her own body.

[4 : 45] And there are many people who believe that the right there, the justice is achieved through the right of an unborn baby to life. Now you may have strong views on that as I do, but there's no denying that both CIs feel that they're on the side of justice.

They are on the side of what's right. But coming to directly, diametrically opposite conclusions to what the other one does. So in many ways, justice seems to be slightly subjective, and we can't say necessarily there's an objective form of justice, at least not without coming to the Bible.

It's probably also fair to say that when we think about justice from our own viewpoint, it is justice for us as often as not.

What's best for me? We come back to our child there. They're saying that's not fair because they feel they've lost out. They're not interested in anyone else. It is their justice, their rights that they're standing up for.

And that I think is very often the case with us too. The things that we feel really strongly about, the injustices that we see round about us, very often their injustices affect us where we're on the receiving end of it.

[6 : 07] Indeed, sometimes, if we can take an example of a child again, think of the opposite situation where they've been found out, and they've done something wrong and their parents have discovered it. What they're interested in at that point is not justice, but mercy.

They want to get off for what they've done again. Even as grown-ups, I'm sure there's a lot of that in us as well. So justice is, and the safe face of it at least, is not something in some cases that we can say absolutely this is just and this is unjust.

The second reason for questioning this is the phrase long for. Why do we long for justice? Do we really long for justice?

Now all of us probably have some injustices we feel really strongly about. And there will be situations where we're willing to do something about them. We might confront someone about their actions.

We might write a letter of complaint to a big company. We might even lobby parliament or go on a protest march about something we feel really strongly about.

[7 : 17] But alongside that, there are many, many situations where we might look at it and say, yeah, that's not right, but actually we're not willing to do anything about it.

We've other priorities in our lives and it doesn't get to the top of things that we say we need to sort that out. We don't want to get our hands dirty by wading in.

If that's the case, can we say we really long for justice? Let me give you thoughts of two philosophers that think can help us. This guy is Plato.

Plato, as I'm sure you know, was an ancient Greek philosopher and he wrote a lot about justice. Now he doesn't have that many easily quotable quotes or borrowed from John Nelix and David Gooding and something they said about Plato.

They said, Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, held that no man could consider himself truly just unless he was prepared not only to receive no reward for acting justly, but to be persecuted for acting justly when he could, by acting unjustly, avoid persecution and receive reward.

[8 : 27] Acting justly goes a bit beyond having a longing for justice, but certainly includes it. And I think there's a bit of a challenge there. When we have a longing for justice, if we do, are we willing to lose out by addressing it?

Are we willing to suffer other people saying to us, you're wrong, or doing things that are really quite nasty to us? That's a challenge, I think, for all of us.

It was brought on to me by this guy. This guy is called Dave. I'm sure many of you know him better than I do. He's a very well-known rapper. I'm not really into rap, but I read two things. One was that Dave's latest album is called The Boy Who Plays the Harp, and the other is that it has a lot of religious themes to it.

So I thought, let's have a look at the title tracks. Let's listen to what he has to say. And I have to say, it's very powerful. So Dave is ultimately in the song, he's looking at King David from Israel, the boy who played the harp, and saying, do I live up to the person I've been named after?

How can you be a king? Don't speak for your people. And he repeatedly challenged himself with two questions. One is, what am I willing to die for?

[9 : 49] And the other is, what would I do in the next generation? I think, actually, what would I do for the next generation would be how most of us would put it. So he thinks, how would I have felt if I'd been enlisted in World War II?

How would I have felt in the midst of the civil rights movement in the States? Would I have been involved? Would I have been making sacrifices for others? Or as he said, would I lay down my life on the line so my grandkids could live a life that's peaceful?

And throughout the song, he questions his priorities. There's a few lines. You don't want to hear me rapping, so I'm just going to read them out normally. But here's some things that Dave said.

I sometimes wonder, what would I do in the next generation? But I'm knowing the answer because what am I doing in this generation? Afraid to speak because I don't want to risk it, my occupation. We've got kids under occupation. My parents, they wouldn't get that. The people that died for our freedom, spoke on justice, couldn't accept that. I talk about the money in all my accounts, so why don't I speak on the West Bank?

[11 : 03] Very challenging, I think, probably for all of us. Are we more interested in our jobs, in our careers, in our comfort, in our money, than we are when we look around us and we see injustice?

We like the idea of justice. We may well feel we know what is just. But often we're more concerned with our own comfort. So there may be many things that we care about, but in the round, do we long for justice?

About weeks ago on Sunday morning, we were looking at the story of the rich-ranked ruler. This man who had everything in worldly terms, who could look at himself and say, I'm a very moral person, I live to high standards.

But when Jesus challenges him effectively on justice, he's not willing to sell what he has and give it to the poor. His money was too important to him. And perhaps that's the challenge for us.

If we think we long for justice, what are we willing to do about it? Are we willing to affect our lifestyle or to get us into some really uncomfortable situations?

[12 : 13] So where have we got to? Our view of justice, I've said, can be subjective and often based on self-interest. Our willingness to do something about it may be limited to how much we care about the particular issue and how much it might cost us.

But given all that, with these caveats, there is in all of us an instinct for that's not fair. We look at something and say, that's not right, something should be done about it.

And I think if we take that as a longing for justice, then we can start to look at the question that we've been given, why do we have that longing? Let's have a look now.

I've got four points and we'll just go through them fairly quickly, then you'll have the opportunity for discussion. So the first thing is that as humans, all humans, we're made in the image of God and we have an inbuilt understanding of right and wrong.

Our God is just. Moses says in Deuteronomy 32.4, He is the rock, his ways are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

[13 : 37] This isn't just something that God does. This is what God is. God is just. And he has a passion for justice, including particularly, as we read to the Bible, justice for the poor and oppressed.

And part of being made in his image is that we have a similar, much weaker, but a similar longing. Paul writes in Romans 2, verses 14 to 15, When the Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.

They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts. Their conscience is also bearing witness. And their thoughts sometimes accusing them, and at other times defending them.

So Paul is saying all of us have an innate sense of right and wrong. It doesn't matter whether we're Christians or not at this point. Everyone has a sense of right or wrong given by God.

And we have a conscience that we choose either to go with or not to go with. Now sometimes our conscience doesn't serve us well. Paul says in Timothy that people have had their consciences seared, as with a hot iron, in other words, they become ineffective.

[14 : 57] But we all have a God-given conscience, and we all have a sense of right and wrong. Paul corrupted the mortality, the clarity of that, because injustice enters our hearts.

But even in our fallen state, we long to be right. God's moral law is active in us, even in those who have no direct knowledge of him, even of those who have never heard of Jesus Christ. God has given them the conscience and the desire to look for him. Second point, maybe a little bit more subtle.

We live in society. And in a society, you need a set of agreed standards. Now living together is God's plan for us. Think right back to the beginning.

God said Adam needs someone to be a companion for him. He made Eve. They had a family. God says you'll stay with your family until you get married, then you'll leave your father and your mother. Then they lived in communities, in extended families, in cities, in nations.

[16:03] And God chose a nation for himself, the nation of Israel. And he gave them a set of laws that they could live by. Ultimately, those of us who know Jesus and our trust is in him, we'll live in a perfect society together in the new Jerusalem with all the saints from down the years.

So we're made to live together. And if you're going to live together in any kind of peace, you need to have a set of commonly agreed standards. You need laws.

That's why God's established governing authorities in countries. Remember Romans 13 says the authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against this authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

We look around the world and even sometimes our own country and we see governments and we recognise they're not governing justly.

We do live in a fallen world and governments sometimes don't prevent injustice. Sometimes they even cause it. And then we feel empathy with those who are suffering.

[17:14] Those from our community or from other communities who are being treated unfairly and are being exploited for the benefit of others. When people who are innocent suffer, when the poor are treated particularly badly, when systems favour the powerful, we look at it and say that's not right.

That's not how society should be. It should be a place of order and of law. And at that point we identify with God's instruction in the book of Amos 5.24, let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream.

We have a sense of what is right and what is wrong of justice because that is necessary if we are to live in society. Now these first two, although I've quoted Bible passages, these are universal things. They're not particularly looking at it as a Christian. We have two more which are much more looking at what we, if we are Christians, particularly understand in this. And if we're Christians, our understanding of justice comes largely through the work of what Jesus has done and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is when we understand God's grace and how his justice has been satisfied through Jesus that we have the desire to go, to copy, to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and to live and to act justly.

[18:51] So when we come to trust in Jesus, we recognise that injustice isn't just something out there that other people do. It's personal. We've all done wrong and if we were to be treated justly by God, then there is a punishment for that.

There are consequences. And the great message of Christian faith, the great message of grace, is that Jesus has taken the punishment of a holy and just God.

What should have come to us, Jesus has taken and God in his mercy has provided a way of forgiveness for us. I love Isaiah 53.

I'm sure you do too. Verse 6 says, We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The cross of Jesus, the death of Jesus, is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us. That he gave his son to die for us.

[19:55] It's also the ultimate demonstration of his justice. That he knew there was no other way that we could be forgiven for all the wrong we've done than for his perfect son to take that punishment for us.

And he was willing to do it as a just God so that he can declare us in Jesus to be righteous. Then as we look at Jesus' life, we see his passion for justice.

In the first sermon that's recorded in Luke chapter 4, he quotes Isaiah 61. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

So we see Jesus living a perfect life. We see God's passion for justice, particularly passion for social justice, throughout the Bible.

[21 : 01] We see above all the death of Jesus and how God's justice was satisfied there. And that reminds us, it brings to our hearts, what an unjust, unjust world we live in.

How sinful we are. And we long for more justice, the justice that comes through the Lord Jesus. And as Christians, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin, bringing us to Jesus, leading us into all truth, and giving us that longing for justice, for things to be right.

In the words of Micah 6, 8, we want to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Then my final point is that we long for a better world.

We anticipate heaven. When we say the Lord's Prayer, we say, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

And in that, we recognise that things are not as they should be. And they're not as they will be. Paul says in Romans 8, we know that the whole creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time.

[22 : 26] Not only so, but we ourselves have the first fruit of the Spirit grown inwardly as we eagerly wait for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

He could have added, as we wait for the justice of God and of the Lord Jesus to be universally seen. We, if we are Christians, have the sure hope that God's justice will ultimately prevail.

One day, he'll bring all wrongdoing into the light and make everything right. One day, Jesus will return and will reign in righteousness.

That hope shouldn't lead us to be passive and to just sit back and wait for that day. It should prompt us to action and persistent prayer as we wait for the Lord's return.

We know that a better day is coming. We know that Jesus is coming back and justice in full will be achieved. And I wonder, do we really long for that day?

[23 : 31] Are we groaning as we look around us at the injustice in the world and saying, come Lord Jesus, come and make everything right? Four reasons why we long for justice.

We're made in God's image. We're living in a society that needs laws, just laws. We know Jesus and the grace that he has shown to us. And we're anticipating heaven.

We're looking forward to the day when everything will be put right. I said I'd end with a Bible reading, so let's do that. It's from Luke chapter 18. And you're very welcome to turn to it if you want to or I'll just read it out.

Luke chapter 18 and I'm reading from verse 1 and it says, Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

He said, In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, Grant me justice against my adversary.

[24 : 37] For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me.

And the Lord said, listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?

Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

I think this brings together quite a lot of what I've been trying to say this evening. We should have the same longing for justice as that widow. We should see when things are wrong and we should be willing to act on our convictions and to not give up even if the answer doesn't come quickly, even if there are discouragements.

we should have absolute confidence in the character of our God. This is a parable not of similarities but of contrast. The contrast is between this unjust ruler who only gives justice because the widow keeps nagging him and he wants to get rid of her and our loving God who desires justice in everything and who is working everything for our good.

[26 : 19] The question's not whether God is just and whether he'll bring about justice. We know that's true. The question is whether we really believe it.

Whether we really believe that Jesus does make a difference when we stand against just injustice in the world. Whether we have the convictions of our conscience even when it's hard for us. Whether when Jesus returns he will find those who are faithful he will find faith on earth he will find people who share his passion for justice.

So let's be encouraged. Let's be encouraged that we have a just God who has shown his amazing grace to us despite all our failures. Rejoice that one day justice will fully be seen to be done.

Let's also think about as I've been challenged I hope you have do I really long for justice? Is it only when it suits me that I'm willing to do anything?

[27 : 20] Do I really long for justice? Am I prepared to make sacrifices to achieve it? Let's pray together. Father we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the comfort and the challenge it gives us. And we recognise that we live in a world of great injustice. But we thank you that in all of us and everybody you have put a sense of right and wrong as part of being made in your image.

And we thank you that we can see particularly your justice as we read your word and particularly as we look at Jesus at his life and especially at his death for us.

I pray that you will give us a real longing for justice. And when you want to stir us into action when there is something that we need to do about it let us be willing to do it.

whatever sacrifices we may need to make. Thank you for your word. We thank you for your presence. We pray you be with us now as we spend some time discussing together. We ask in Jesus name.

[28 : 24] Amen.