

Justice

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's a pleasure to be here tonight, and it's a pleasure to be able to open up this passage and the subject of justice. So as Graeme said, and as if you're around this morning, I'm a member of the Edinburgh Street Pastors.

And as Graeme said, we go out into the streets of Edinburgh. We do that. We want to show God's love to the most vulnerable in society. And, you know, it was my very first patrol.

We were out at 2 a.m. on a December night, and we were chatting to this group, and they'd spilled out of the pub. And, you know, this guy was talking. He said, you know, why are you here? What are you doing?

Often people think it's a council-run thing, and we're paid to be there, a sort of, you know, social response from the council. But, you know, we are there as a response to God's love and his mercy.

We are there to show love and to care for the most vulnerable. We come across the homeless. We come across people who have no control because of drink or drugs. We come across girls who are alone, have got lost.

[1 : 0 5] They've lost their friends. They've got no battery left on their phone. And, you know, it's a joy and a passion of mine, and my heart goes out to these people in their vulnerable state. And it's a joy to be able to share God's love with them at these times.

Well, why am I telling you this? Well, I wonder what comes to your head when you think of justice. When Graham asked me to speak on justice, my head started going all sorts of places.

I thought of phrases like, justice must be done. And I thought of the demonstrators chanting, no justice, no peace. The news, it's been filled with justice recently.

We've had the protests in America and across the world about the injustice, often aimed at the police. We also had the death of the U.S. Supreme Court justice.

And the political effects that that's going to have and the implications on the American court system and laws. So I found myself asking all these questions. So that's what we're going to do tonight.

[2 : 0 9] We're going to ask some questions about what justice is. We're going to see what the Bible says about justice. We're going to see why it matters. And we're going to have a look at how we can apply it into our own lives.

So we're going to get straight dived into the subject. So what is justice? Well, I always think you're good to start in the dictionary. So Merriam-Webster says it is the maintenance or administration of what is just.

It can also be a title, so the Supreme Court justice. Or it is the administration of law. So you could have a fugitive from justice. So they're all under one heading.

And a secondary meaning of justice is also the quality of being just, impartial, or fair. You know, when I first thought of justice, my head went to judgment.

The punishment for wrongdoings. But the other side of justice is what we would nowadays call social justice. This is the fair treatment and the upholding of people's rights.

[3 : 14] So what does the Bible say about justice? Well, as we read here in Micah 6, it's a great passage. And in verse 8, we are to act justly and to love mercy.

To act justly and to love mercy. Now that word justice there or justly in Hebrew is mishpat. And that word is actually used 200 times, over 200 times in the Old Testament.

So it's safe to say there's plenty of references to justice. And in the Bible, it means to treat people equitably, which I always struggle to say. Which means fairly or impartially.

So that is whether we are punishing or whether we are acquitting people. We are to do so impartially and fairly. But justice, this word mishpat, also means to give people their rights or what they are due.

If you have someone in your house and you get them to paint a room, you should pay them for their work. You shouldn't withhold that money from them because they are due that. And this word mishpat or justice is also most of the time linked with this other word, which I definitely can't pronounce, which I'm going to call tzedakah.

[4 : 31] And this is often translated as righteous. And this word means to treat all with fairness and generosity. An example of when these two, and Graham actually read, run out earlier as well, would be Psalm 33 verse 5.

The Lord loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of his unfailing love. Another way you could paraphrase that would be the Lord loves social justice.

The earth is full of his unfailing love. But you know, being just and righteous is not just some state that we adopt. We don't wake up in the morning and go, today I will be just and right.

These are actions that we live out. These are doing words. So justice, justice is primary. We are to be fair and equitable in our relationships to avoid injustice.

But justice is also rectifying in the sense that we punishment, there is punishment for wrongdoing. And there is also the care for the victims of injustice. You know, the protesters in America that I mentioned before, and elsewhere, they want to see an overhaul to create a fair society where there is no need to protest.

[5 : 50] There is no need to demand justice from those in power. They want the rectifying justice of bringing those responsible to court. And yet they also want that primary justice of a society that is fair, So that is what the Bible defines as justice.

So where do we see it? Well, we see justice in the form of judgment from God. Throughout Micah, and it's a fascinating book, but the Old Testament as a whole, we see God as a judge who brings judgment for wrongdoing.

Micah 6, 12 to 13. We didn't read it. It's just a few verses later. It says, Your rich people are violent. Your inhabitants are liars. And their tongues speak deceitfully.

Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins. God brings judgment because it is the fair and the right response to the sins of the people.

In Micah, the leaders are called out. The prophets are called out. The powerful are called out. For being corrupt. For being self-serving. And for being greedy.

[7 : 07] We could be reading this in the newspapers today. So we see justice in the form of judgment, but we also see justice in the instructions and the teachings to care for the poor, to care for the elderly, and to care for the vulnerable.

An example of this in the Old Testament would be the leftover grain. So when the Israelites were harvesting their fields, they weren't to sweep back round and do a second look in order to pick up all the grain off the ground.

They were to leave this, and in behind would come the poor. They would come the vulnerable, so they could have food as well. Another one would be when the people of Israel were in the wilderness, and there was the manna, the bread that was left every morning on the ground for them to eat.

If they were greedy and gathered too much, it would rot overnight. And this taught them that there was enough to go around, and they weren't to be greedy. But we also can't avoid calls to care for the vulnerable in Jesus' teachings.

In Mark 12, we have the call from Jesus to love our neighbor. Jesus lived by example. He lived alongside the poor. He cared for their needs.

[8 : 19] He gave them time, and he gave them help. But it wasn't just the poor. It was the whole spectrum of society, from rich to poor, popular, and unpopular.

Some examples of this would be when Jesus spoke to women in public. This was a social faux pas of the time. He healed and touched lepers. He gave time to children, who the disciples thought was crazy.

He stopped in his tracks. He stopped his journey in order to give time and to heal the blind beggar. He also ate in the house of a tax collector, who were hated people for what they did for a living.

We can learn so much from Jesus' life on earth, and how he treated those, not only who came to him, but who he sought out where they were. Jesus was the embodiment of justice.

So that's what justice is, and that's what the Bible says about it. But how does God do justice? Well, first of all, God is just, and God is holy. God can't turn a blind eye.

[9 : 29] God can't just let one go. God must judge and confront evil. You know, the U.S. system, which I talked about before, with the death of the Supreme Court justice, this may change the balance in the court, from liberal to conservative, and it might have an implication for years to come.

And you know, there's a political edge here, because if Trump gets to appoint one before the election, then it'll have a varying effect, and if Biden gets in, then he gets to appoint one. So there's a political edge to the court system.

But this is not the case with God. God is just. God is holy. Secondly, how does God do justice? Well, Jesus will be the just judge at the end of time.

This means that we need to be right with God when this happens. We see in Micah 6, 6 to 7, that we read, I'll read it again. It says, With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? And it starts to accelerate. It says, Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

[10 : 43] Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? These were empty offerings that had no meaning behind them.

And this teaches us that we can't get by on our own merits. We are not good enough in ourselves. Romans 3, 22 to 24 tells us that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And all are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. We all need to be made right by the redemption that comes through Jesus.

Nothing we do on our own will ever stand up in the court of Christ. Thirdly, how does God do justice? Well, God gives us mercy. This is something we as Christians can be so thankful for.

In Micah 6, we see that God has proven himself to be faithful and merciful to his people. In 4 and 5, we read that he took them out of Egypt.

[11 : 49] He brought them out of slavery. He gave them leaders. Instead of being cursed, they were blessed. And he took them across the Jordan and into the promised land.

History means that we can trust God. We can have confidence in him. The death of Jesus on the cross was the justice of God fully demonstrated.

But it was also the greatest act of grace. So how does mercy tie up with justice? Well, Jesus took the punishment from God for the sins of those who will believe in him.

The price has been paid. We just need to accept it. Can you imagine you're, hopefully not, but you're up at the wrong mile at high court. And the judge is handing you down a life sentence and saying to you, justice must be done.

And just at that moment, someone steps in and says, I'll take that punishment for you. Justice has been done, but we have been spared. That's what Jesus has done.

[12 : 55] So we've looked at what justice says. The Bible says about it. We've seen how God does justice. So why are we to care about justice?

Why should we care? You know, at this point, we might be thinking of the Justice League. You know, the superheroes, Batman, Superman, and the others who go about dishing out justice as they see fit.

You know, these people with superpowers, special abilities, looking out for the lowly, the helpless, average Joe, who can't help themselves. But you know, doing justice is not just for those who are strong, those who are mighty.

It is for all of us. So why should we care? Well, first of all, because of what God has done for us. It is our response to his love and compassion.

Once again, Micah 6, verse 8, to act justly and to love mercy. By grace, we have been saved. We are to respond to this amazing grace.

[14 : 02] We are to do so by doing justice out of merciful love. Why are we to care? Secondly, while we're made in the image of God, as are all people.

This means that we aren't to discriminate or favor. Ian was saying this morning that none of us are better than the other. And you know, discrimination, it comes from the idea of superiority. I am better than you, therefore I can treat you however I like.

As we read before, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus never showed partiality, and he is our ultimate example. He met and interacted with the rich and the poor, the lepers and the kings, the religious and the irreligious.

Now this isn't easy, and I know this isn't easy, because we naturally come across people who we bond with, people we get on well with, and there's those that we naturally don't get on well with. But this is what we are called to do.

Thirdly, why should we care? Well, as God's followers, we are to see as he sees, and to love what he loves. The end of verse 8 says, to walk humbly with your God.

[15 : 18] Walk humbly with your God. What does that mean? Well, we are to know God. You know, if I live my life, and I never knew what my wife liked in her cup of tea, or I never knew what she liked to do if she had a spare hour of her time, there would be something wrong with that.

And you know, as we walk life with God, we are to know him. We are to do as he would have us to do. We are to love what he loves. That is what walking closely with God is.

And finally, why are we to care about justice? Well, justice brings hope. Last week, Graham was speaking on Ephesians 2, and how Jesus is our peace, that amazing truth.

Well, I was sitting wanting to shout, no justice, no peace. You know, if Jesus wasn't judge, then there would be no justice, which means there would be no peace.

Peace being eternity in harmony with God, creation restored. We see this throughout Micah, that as God brings justice in the form of judgment, Israel is given hope of a future peace, free of corruption, free of sin, free of oppression.

[16 : 37] So, finally, who are we to do justice to? We've seen what justice says, we've seen what the Bible says about it, how God does justice, and why we should care. So, who are we to do justice to?

Well, first of all, everyone. Galatians 6 and 10 tells us, therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

It's Galatians 6 and 10. we aren't to show partiality. We aren't to discriminate. We aren't to favor. And it isn't just fellow Christians that we should do good to, but all.

But, we should be especially wary of the vulnerable, the foreigner or the immigrant, the widow, the poor, the orphan.

Luke 14, 12 to 13 says, then Jesus said to his host, when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors.

[17 : 43] If you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. This is a remarkable passage, which instructs who we should be showing hospitality to.

In these days that Jesus is speaking, banquets were social affairs, but they were also business affairs, where networking would be done. It was that case where I'll scratch your back, and at some point you will scratch mine.

We're told here to care for those, and quite literally invite them in, those who can't defend themselves, those who can't repay you the favor, those who are most likely to suffer injustice, and need that care and support.

Finally, who are we to do justice to? Well, it's going to be different for each one of us. It depends where you are, what you do with your time.

[18 : 51] It depends where God has put you in life. It also depends on your gifts and your talents, what you're good at, your strengths and your weaknesses. But you know, there are some things we can do.

We aren't to live in a bubble, a comfortable bubble. We need to get out there, be involved in people's lives. We also aren't just to give handouts, and hope for the best.

Jesus was the prime example of getting involved in people's lives. You know, some examples, and I take them from my own life, because that's the only experience I have, is we spent some time in Tanzania, and we were at a leper colony.

And you know, when you would arrive, they would quite literally crawl to you, because they would look, they didn't have their limbs, because of what, the leprosy that they had. And you know, these were people that the government had abandoned.

Their family and friends couldn't help them. There was no one there for them. These were the most vulnerable people, in that society. You know, in the church, we run the basics back.

[19 : 56] And you know, that's for people who've ended up in a situation where they cannot help themselves, and they need help to get through the week, to feed themselves or their families. But it's also just in our day-to-day lives.

You know, maybe we're an employer, maybe we have people underneath us at work. Do we show them favoritism? Do we discriminate between them? Maybe we're an employee.

How do we act towards our colleagues? Do we have our favorites? Or maybe it's within our families, whether it's with our children, whether it's with our relatives.

Do we show no partiality in our dealings with them? You know, I love doing street pastors. I love being able to go to where people are at, and engage in their lives.

Like I said this morning, the chances are, if you're out in about at 2 a.m. on a Saturday night, going into Sunday morning, you're not going to turn up to church the next day. Certainly when I'm on patrol, I rarely make it up in time.

[21 : 01] But it's amazing to be able to go on the streets, and to share God's love with people, practically through just being there, if needed. Listening to people, caring for people, sometimes in their lowest place.

You know, it's sometimes a shocking reminder of the vulnerability of people. Whether it's the homeless person who's sleeping in a shop doorway, open to the elements, open to other people, open to animals.

Or maybe it's a teenager lost in a new city, lost her friends, lost her keys, lost her phone. And you know, street pastors might not be for you. You know, it's only an example, but the challenge I want to leave with you is how are you serving the most vulnerable in our society, protecting them, or caring for them, because of injustice?

In your day-to-day life, are you treating people fairly? Not discriminating, not showing favoritism? As I talked about at the beginning, justice can have different meanings, and it elicits various thoughts in our heads.

Hopefully this has encouraged you to seek out and learn more about justice in the Bible. We could do a sermon series on justice until Christmas and still not complete it. Once you start, you begin to see justice everywhere you look in the Bible.

[22 : 22] I've been reading Tim Keller's book, I haven't finished it, but it's called Generous Justice, and I would recommend it. It's really good. You know, most of all my prayer is that this has ignited a desire in your heart to do justice in love in your daily life as you walk with God.

As we finished, I would just like to read James chapter 2 just as we go. It's James chapter 2. I've got to read 1 to 13.

James is just after Hebrews, just a few before Revelation. James chapter 2, verse 1. My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing, and say, you sit here in a good place, or you say to the poor man, you stand over there, or sit down at my feet.

Have you not made then distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

[23 : 45] But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court?

Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

For he who said do not commit adultery also said do not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. mercy triumphs over judgment. Thanks for listening.