

CHAPTER 07 SUMMARY: “PURSUE JUSTICE”

Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything, by Jeremy Treat

“The kingdom of God gives us the framework for pursuing justice in a world of injustice.”

A KINGDOM OF JUSTICE

- “Justice is at the heart of the biblical vision for the kingdom. Why? Because God is a just king. Psalm 9:7 says, ‘The Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice’” (p. 119).

1. Justice is God’s Agenda before It’s Ours

- “Justice is God’s agenda, to be a part of the work that he’s doing and restoring the beautiful order of creation” (p. 119).
- “God’s reign it’s good news for the marginalized. In fact throughout the Old Testament, we see God’s heart for the poor, the fatherless, immigrants, and widows (Zech. 7:10). These were the most vulnerable people in society and are often taken advantage of or forgotten. But God has not forgotten them” (p. 120).
- “In the Old Testament, God identified with the marginalized; in the New Testament, he became one of them” (p. 120).

2. Called to Be a People of Justice

- “Justice is God’s agenda. But *how* does God execute justice? That usually brings justice through is justified people” (p. 120).
- “The call to be a people of justice is proclaimed beautifully by the prophet Micah. He asked the people of God, ‘What does the Lord require of you...?’ The answer is clear: To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)” (pp. 120-121).
- “Justice it’s not merely a suggestion or a good idea; it is a requirement from God.... The call to justice is not an optional add-on for a few socially minded, passionate Christians. If God is passionate about something, then indifference is not an option for us. God cares about justice, and it as much as he is the God of justice, we are called to be a people of justice” (p. 121).
- “In the kingdom, God’s mercy and justice are shown through a people who reflect the heart of their king. The call to justice is not simply about championing an issue, but rather embodying the kingdom” (p. 121).

3. What is justice?

- “While Western society thinks of justice predominantly in legal terms, the Hebrew understanding of justice was a vision of a beautiful order for all of life. For the Jewish people, justice was not nearly legal, it was personal, relational, social, global, and even cosmic” (p. 121).
- “The Hebrew word for justice—*mishpat*—refers to treating people equitably, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or ability to contribute to a society. *Mishpat* is giving someone what they deserve, whether punishment or protection. That it is done equitably is at the heart of justice” (pp. 120-121).

THE UNIQUE ETHICS OF THE KINGDOM

- “It’s time for Christians to own up to the fact that we have a unique ethic shaped by life under God’s reign. We all want human flourishing, but we have different understandings of what that means and how to achieve it. One of the most important ways that Christians can help define and contribute to the common good is by teaching the foundational idea that all people are made in the image of God and are deserving of dignity and value” (p. 125).

HUMAN DIGNITY FROM THE WOMB TO THE TOMB

- “Christians believe that all people are made in the image of God and therefore worthy of dignity, value, and respect” (p. 125).

1. Where Dignity Comes From

- “Why, then, do Christians believe that all people have dignity and deserve certain rights? ‘In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them’ (Gen. 1:27). Dignity is not something that has to be earned or achieved; it is bestowed by God as a fact of every human being. As John Perkins says, ‘You don’t give people dignity...you affirm it’” (p. 126).

2. Dignity for All

- “God gives a vision of seeking justice for all, from the womb to the tomb.... Christians are people who see the image of God in the unborn, the mentally or physically disabled, the immigrant, the widow, the poor, the prisoner, and the elderly” (p. 126).

3. Driven by Dignity More Than Needs

- “A dignity-driven approach enables us to acknowledge people’s needs without defining them by their needs.... The dignity of all human life reminds us that we’re never merely talking about ‘issues’; we’re talking about people, image bearers of God who are worthy of respect” (p. 127)

4. The Messiah’s Mission of Justice

- “Most people know that Jesus came to bring love and mercy, but he recognized that he also came to bring justice. The book of Isaiah the Lord expresses the Messiah’s mission in this way: ‘I put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations’ (Isa. 42:1)” (p. 127).
- Jesus embodied justice throughout his life. Yet Jesus would ultimately display justice in the most shocking way. He brought about justice not by punishing the wicked but by taking their place. On the cross he was righteous and just died in the place of the wicked and cruel. The judge took the place of the judged. That just died for the unjust. Why? To make us righteous. To make us just” (p. 128).

THE GOSPEL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- “...the gospel creates a people who seek mercy and justice. Why? Because the gospel gives us eyes to see others the way God does, and gives new hearts that motivate us to be involved in the work of justice that God is doing. The gospel gets to the heart, drawing us to God and into God’s mission. The more we understand the gospel, the more we are drawn into Christ’s heart for the oppressed and hurting “ (p. 129).

- “Throughout Scripture, we see that a true encounter with the grace of God leads to a sacrificial heart for the marginalized and oppressed. Doing justice is not the reason we receive grace, but it most certainly will be a result of receiving grace. Faith produces works” (p. 129).
- “Seeking justice doesn't replace the gospel, but it should flow from a heart that is transformed by the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel must be accompanied with a demonstration of mercy and justice” (p. 129).

WHAT SHOULD I DO? Listen. Learn. Speak. Act. (pp. 130-132)

A CASE STUDY ON RACISM

1. The Biblical Vision of a Multiethnic Kingdom

- “Racism is a rejection of God’s declaration that all of humanity reflects his nature” (p. 133).
- “The church has a twofold calling. First, the church, as a multiethnic people united in Christ, it's called the model the reconciling power of the gospel to the world longing for genuine community. Second, the church, as disciples sent out by Jesus, is called to be peacemakers and ambassadors of reconciliation in a world that is racially divided” (p. 134).

2. The Most Segregated Hour of the Week

- “The church is meant to be part of God’s answer to racism in the world, but unfortunately it has often contributed to the problem instead. The old adage that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America sadly remains true. One study showed that while 86% of Protestant churches in the United States are made up of one predominant racial group, only 33% of American church growers believe that their church needs to do more in pursuing racial diversity” (p. 135).
- “The gospel makes us a family where the waters of baptism run thicker than the blood of family origin” (p. 135).

3. Diverse Unity

- “Racism is a sin, but so is indifference to racism. If God cares enough about bringing together every tribe and tongue that he sent his Son to the cross, then we are called to participate in this reconciling work” (p. 136).

4. Reconciling Love

- John Perkins, “My deepest desire has been that the reconciling love that God displayed on the cross would spread into all the world, and that somehow I could participate in that mission” (p. 137).