

Understanding Justice and the Gospel

PRAYER:

Jeremiah 23:5–6 [5] “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

We live in a world filled with injustice. Cry out to the Lord on behalf of these injustices. Confess your contribution to them in various ways.

Worship the Lord for his promised solution for the injustice, the GodMan, Jesus Christ.

SERMON:

- I. Intro → Injustice during COVID-19
 - A. Unemployment
 - B. Businesses
 - C. Persecuted Church
 - D. World’s Poorest
 - E. Racial Tension & Riots
- II. Biblical Backdrop for Justice
 - A. Humans are different from animals...
 1. Examples
 - B. When humans behave like animals, we are shocked. Why? Why does it bother us when humans do it, but not when animals do it?
 1. Intrinsically we know that there is something different about humans and animals.
 2. Different in creation... Humans are set apart as the image of God -
 - a) Image: God’s representatives who rule the world by his definition of good and evil
 - (1) Mirror, Reflection, stewards of the King
 3. As image bearers, we have the fingerprints of God on our being. As such, all humans are equal before God and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect no matter who they are.
 - C. This is what makes the sin of injustice so barbaric. It is image bearers treating other image bearers as if they were not image bearers.
 1. To put it another way, it is humans acting like animals by treating other humans like animals!

2. How did the world get like this? How did it get so upside down?
- D. The fall in the garden
1. Image bearers by design intended to rule by God's definition of good and evil
 2. But into the scene comes this non-human entity, known as the adversary, a cunning serpent, who challenges the image bearers very identity.
 - a) Should they represent God's understanding of good and evil? Why not define good and evil for yourselves? Then you would be like God. Then you wouldn't need God unless YOU wanted him around.
 3. Deceived, tricked, duped, they listen to the deceiver and embrace a world where image bearers reflect themselves and created things
 - a) The result is a world where good is evil and evil is good
 - b) A world where individuals oppress other individuals in a 'dog eat dog' world
 - c) A world where good and evil is redefined to whatever is good for ME and the easiest victims are the weak
 - d) A world where the strong, the powerful, the manipulative, or those who are willing to leverage anything they have (no matter how precious) survive and the rest are pressed down
 - e) Ultimately, this results in oppression from individuals, families, cities, entire nations
- E. As God steps into the scene w/ the nation of Israel, he is very much concerned with justice
1. Biblical justice refers to restorative justice, seeking out vulnerable people to help them (e.g. charity), advocating for them, defending them, living selflessly, for the benefit of the needy
 2. Why is God concerned with this? Because Israel is given the original command given to Adam and Eve - they are designed to represent him to the world
 - a) Kingdom of priests, a lighthouse to the nations, a kingdom to serve their God, they as his subjects, he as their king
 3. And it is important to make mention of the reality that the Israelites were rescued by this King OUT of oppression and slavery. This becomes the foundation for the justice they are called to embody.
 - a) *Deuteronomy 24:17–22, [17] "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, [18] but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. [19] "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of*

your hands. [20] When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. [21] When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. [22] You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

4. So God takes oppressed people, rescues them, stands on their behalf, and then tasks them to do the same for the world around them
 - a) They are called to live lives of justice, uprightness, righteousness, love, restoration, fairness, equity, and so on and so forth.
 5. But what happens? These rescued people go on to commit the same acts that they were guilty of. What does God do? He condemns them with the same condemnation that he gave to Egypt before them - the nation from which they were rescued.
- F. Throughout the OT, we see the foundation of the call for justice and then the condemnation of the people of God for failing to walk in this justice.

1. *Isaiah 58*

*[1] "Cry aloud; do not hold back;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.*

*[2] Yet they seek me daily
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that did righteousness
and did not forsake the judgment of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they delight to draw near to God.*

*[3] 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'*

*Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.*

*[4] Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.*

*Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.*

*[5] Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the LORD?*

*[6] "Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
[7] Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
[8] Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
[9] Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'
If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
[10] if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.
[11] And the LORD will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.
[12] And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.

[13] "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
[14] then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

G. Speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, God makes a promise of future justice built upon future righteousness

1. *Jeremiah 23:5–6 [5] “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’*
2. From the Bible, we know that the issue of justice is an issue of righteousness. Abraham and his descendants were designed to stand in opposition to injustice because they acted in righteousness
3. In Jeremiah, we see that righteousness is
 - a) A Problem - namely our lack of righteousness
 - b) A Person - this branch of David
 - c) Our future possession - OUR righteousness
4. God makes this promise about how he will deal with the injustice in the world through a person who will somehow be our righteousness

H. Enter Jesus

1. Jesus enters into the a dark world, the kingdom of Satan, but he is untarnished by the corrupted nature of it all
2. Jesus succeeds in the the temptation of this other worldly being where Adam and Eve failed
3. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life, standing against injustice, helping the despondent, rebuking the proud religious leaders, and never once harming another human being with violence
4. Jesus entrusted his justice to the Lord, knowing that the sovereign God would, ultimately, get vengeance and that Jesus could willingly die believing that God would raise him from the dead.
5. Jesus dies as an oppressed innocent, conquering injustice with love and resurrection
6. Most importantly, on that cross he pays the debt of sin incurred by thousands of years of injustice and unrighteousness. He satisfies the wrath of God - a wrath that should have been poured out on us
7. In his resurrection, he secures a new way out of injustice into a new humanity, a new kingdom
8. He offers this new way of living (today and forever) by placing his Spirit within those who follow him by faith, teaching them his ways, and empowering them to live the life that we were always commanded
9. Jesus deals with our lack of righteousness by offering us his own
10. Jesus is the source of our righteousness and the only one who can truly change with any permanence the injustices of the world
11. Jesus becomes OUR righteousness as we join him in union as his body

12. This is how the gospel stands against and conquers injustice, not with horizontal action alone, but with vertical reconciliation which becomes the foundation for any reconciliation we see on this earth.

III. What do we do? → Kingdom Ethic & Kingdom Voice (Matthew 5-7)

- A. Kingdom Ethic → His kingdom come, his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven
- B. Kingdom Voice → The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe for times of refreshing and jubilee
- C. Practical Application → Kingdom Ethic and Kingdom Voice → Spiritual Action & Statement
 - 1. Pray & fast
 - 2. Don't be paralyzed into thinking you need to change the planet
 - 3. Act in small ways → Kingdom is like a mustard seed...
 - a) Friend who are financially struggling
 - b) Local benevolence needs (e.g. Cape Hope, Food Pantries, Branches, etc)
 - c) Those who are impacted as business owners (don't assume they are wealthy and unscathed!)
 - d) Minorities
 - e) Police

Group Discussion:

- Who are the vulnerable today?
- What injustice grieves you the most right now? What do you think God thinks and feels about this and why?
- Who around you might need support in this crisis?
- What does it look like for YOU to live with Kingdom Ethic and Kingdom Voice?