

These past 10 weeks, I have preached a sermon series on what the Bible has to say about justice, while also contrasting Biblical justice from much of what is called justice in the world around us. This morning, I am going to attempt to summarize the past ten weeks, and then we will open it up for a time of testimonies, where you will have the opportunity to share what you have learned or what God has done in your life through this series. This series was something I originally planned to preach in the spring of 2021, as I had been noticing an increased focus in what the world calls Social Justice, particularly since the death of George Floyd in 2020. And while there were elements of this increased call for justice that were admirable and encouraging, such as the passion to make the world a better place and to lift up those who were perceived to be oppressed and to give a voice to those who were considered marginalized, there were other aspects that felt misguided and dangerous. But since justice is such a big issue, I just didn't feel ready to tackle this in the spring, nor was I ready in the summer. I still didn't feel ready heading into the fall, but I decided that I needed to just dive in and see how the Lord would lead. And now, having spent ten weeks on the topic, I feel like this summary sermon will truly lay out what I believe God's heart for justice is, and why it is better than the justice movements of our world.

What is wrong with the modern justice movements? Let me share four things I see:

### 1) Injustice is not just something out there

As much as we may like to think of ourselves as the good guys fighting against unjust systems and corrupt people, the truth is far more pernicious. Injustice is not just something out there; it is something in here that must be addressed in us. We are sinners. We are broken, twisted, and prone to self-centeredness and bias.

**Mark 7:20-23** - *He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'* <sup>21</sup> *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,* <sup>22</sup> *greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.* <sup>23</sup> *All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"*

There are many reasons that people don't look at themselves first. Many people miss that, either because they do not like the concept of sin and prefer to think of themselves as self-created masterpieces, or maybe they are just blind to it, or maybe they just compare themselves to others and feel righteous in comparison to those evil people or unjust systems out there. But unless you address the injustice, the bias, the sin, the brokenness on the inside, then what you will achieve in the

end will not be justice, but a replacement of one kind of injustice with another kind of injustice. Remember what Jesus said:

*Matthew 7:1-5 - "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

Until you take the plank out of your own eye, you are not going to see clearly to remove the speck from the eye of your neighbor, or to deal with the sin and injustice around you. Unless people deal with their own injustice, then those who are trying to tear down what they see as the power structures of society are not going to achieve a world of equality, but a world where one type of power and oppression has been replaced by another kind of power and oppression.

## 2) Justice and injustice are defined by God, not by personal preference

For many in our world, truth has been replaced by personal preference.

*Judges 17:6 - In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*

If you want to know what is right and wrong, look to Him. Our world is about personal preference, being self-created and self-defined, choosing what we feel is right and wrong, and nobody can tell us otherwise. But this leads to internal chaos. When you reject a God-given identity, it leads to confusion and fragility, as we are beholden to our ever-changing desires and opinions, while also becoming deeply sensitive to the opinions and value-judgments of others. And it leads to cultural chaos, as the world becomes a marketplace of competing tastes and preferences, with no consensus on what is right or wrong. Truth belongs to whoever can shout the loudest and shame others best. We will never find justice or peace or unity that way.

## 3) Tribalism leads to division, not unity and justice

Many modern justice movements operate by dividing people into categories and labeling them and treating every individual in that group as the same. This will never lead to justice and peace. The categories by which the world divides must

come down, and they only come down in Christ, in who there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. In the family of Christ, we find unity.

*Galatians 3:28-29 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

All are welcome by God's grace.

#### 4) Salvation is by grace, not by being "good enough"

You will never be good enough. The justice issues are all around you.

As Michael, the character played by Ted Danson in NBC's *The Good Place* said, "These days just buying a tomato at a grocery store means that you are unwittingly supporting toxic pesticides, exploiting labor, contributing to global warming."

You can either feel good enough by lowering the bar or comparing yourself to others, or by turning a blind eye. The only way to truly fight injustice without burning out is to know we are saved by grace, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and to know that God will one day make a final end to injustice.

*Ephesians 2:8-10 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

The gospel is what empowers, and what keeps us from burning out, as we trust in what Jesus has done, in the Spirit He has given us, and in the final end He will make to injustice.

#### So what is the call to justice?

This is the call. To love others. Like Jesus loved us. Sacrificially. To become broken bread and poured out wine. To be sacrificial. Love means seeing others as created in God's image, full of dignity and worth. The parable of the sheep and the goats means realizing that Jesus identifies with the poor and the outcast, that to love and serve them is to love and serve Jesus.

The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that loving our neighbor means being willing to inconvenience yourself, risk your own safety, and bear the cost for

anyone who is in need, even your enemy. That may mean loving an individual. It may mean challenging unjust systems. But either way, it will be costly.

That is where life and joy and fulfillment is found, in doing for others. It is not found in comfort, in self-centeredness. You have been saved by grace for good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do. Walk in them.

This is what we were created for in Christ. That is where we find the greatest joy and fulfillment and purpose and reward. It all matters eternally. The needs are great, the hurts are deep, and we need to do this together. We can not do this alone. We were not meant to do this alone. There are people with a heart to provide clean water to those in need. There are organizations who understand how to lift people out of poverty in third world countries. There are people devoted to adopting those who have no family, or visiting those in prison, or in nursing homes. There are people who are feeding the hungry, clothing the naked. By ourselves, we can do so little. Together, we can do so much. What part has God called you to play?