

# Justice (For Such A Time as This)

## Sermon Summary

This sermon synthesizes a theological argument that redefines biblical justice, shifting from a traditional, punitive model focused on individual sin to a comprehensive, restorative framework centered on systemic goodness and healing. The central thesis posits that God's justice is not primarily about retribution but is an active expression of God's character, manifested as restoration, equity, and the establishment of systems where all creation can thrive. This concept is presented as synonymous with the "Good News" of the Christian Gospel.

A core operational framework is introduced through the metaphor of "two lungs": justice requires both **Proclamation** (evangelism, or sharing the good news) and **Demonstration** (social action, or living out that news). The ministry of Jesus and the prophetic song of Mary (the Magnificat) serve as principal examples of this integrated approach. The ultimate call to action is for an immediate, present-day engagement in justice, understood not as the simple removal of injustice, but as the active work of filling voids with positive forces like light, life, and compassion. This work is rooted in the foundational experience of being known and loved by God, a reality that must be both personally realized and extended to others.

## I. Critique of a Traditional Punitive Justice Model

The sermon begins by deconstructing a common theological perspective on justice, which is characterized as limited and potentially toxic. This model is rooted in a framework of individual sin and deserved punishment.

- **Foundation:** The traditional view is illustrated by a conversation regarding the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," by Jonathan Edwards, which posits that all humanity, by default, deserves hell.
- **Core Tenets:** This perspective defines God's attributes in a transactional manner:
  1. **Justice:** God giving humanity what it deserves, which is hell.
  2. **Mercy:** God not giving humanity what it deserves, resulting in pardon and forgiveness.
  3. **Grace:** God giving humanity what it does not deserve, namely righteousness and the status of an heir.
- **Primary Criticisms:** This framework is critiqued on two main grounds:
  1. **Negative Framing:** It explains justice exclusively from a platform of evil and sin, failing to articulate a vision of justice rooted in God's inherent goodness.
  2. **Individualistic Focus:** It confines the concepts of righteousness and justice to the lives of individuals, neglecting their application to broader systems and the whole of creation.

## II. Redefining Biblical Justice as Restorative and Systemic

In contrast to the punitive model, the document proposes a broader, more holistic understanding of justice rooted in God's character and demonstrated through restorative action.

- **Source of Justice:** Quoting Timothy Keller, it asserts that "Biblical justice is not first of all a set of bullet points or a set of rules and guidelines. It is rooted in the very character of God." Jesus Christ is presented as the clearest and most untainted expression of this character and, therefore, of God's justice.
- **The Overarching Narrative:** While acknowledging a place for retribution in scripture, the primary narrative of God's justice is identified as one of restoration. Dr. Carla Works is cited to highlight that human understanding of justice is always limited by cultural context, necessitating a turn to the divine revelation in Christ.
- **Characteristics of God's Justice:** This restorative vision of justice is multifaceted and encompasses the following attributes:

Attribute	Description
Restoration	Making wrong things right, including forgiveness for wrongs done and healing for wrongs suffered.
Systems of Goodness	Goes beyond individual acts to establish societal structures that promote well-being.
Equity	Ensures that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.
Diversity	Implies a vision of justice that includes and values all people.
Universal Grace	Offered to the entire world without merit or precondition.

<b>Meeting Needs</b>	Fills the need of every person and system so that the abundance of God can be experienced by all.
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- **The Prophetic Vision:** The passage from Micah 4:4, where "everyone will sit under their own fig tree... And no one will be afraid," is used as a symbolic representation of this justice. It depicts a state of peace, rightness, and universal thriving that is troubling to "those who already have."

### III. Examples of Justice: Jesus and Mary

The sermon presents both Jesus's ministry and Mary's song (the Magnificat) as primary illustrations of God's restorative justice in action and proclamation.

#### A. Jesus's Ministry: The Demonstration of Justice

Jesus's work is framed as the ultimate embodiment of God's justice, moving beyond theoretical discussion to tangible action. When John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus's response (from Matthew 11:5) is a list of restorative actions: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor." This demonstrates that God's justice is found wherever there is healing, restoration, and care for the poor, the sick, and the excluded.

#### B. The Magnificat: The Proclamation of Justice

The analysis of Luke 1:39-56 positions Mary's song as a powerful declaration of God's justice.

1. **Contextual Grace:** Before the song, Mary receives practical support from her relative Elizabeth during the high-risk first trimester of her pregnancy. This is presented as a form of God's grace and justice, providing a needed support system when her family and community would not.
2. **The Song's Content:** Though the word "justice" does not appear in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), its themes are a clear articulation of a just, restorative world order:
  - **Reversal of Power:** "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."
  - **Reversal of Fortune:** "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."
  - **Divine Faithfulness:** God's actions are a fulfillment of the merciful promises made to Israel's ancestors.
3. **Worship as Declaration:** Mary's song is a response of worship that sees beyond her personal predicament to the "big picture" of God's work in the world. Her favor from God is not for her alone but to be a "conduit through which people might come to know God."

## IV. The Core Framework: Proclamation and Demonstration

The document establishes a central metaphor to describe the necessary components of enacting justice: the two lungs of the Body of Christ. A healthy and vital faith, both for individuals and the church, requires both to function.

- **Lung 1: Proclamation (Evangelism):** This is the act of declaring the good news of God's justice.
- **Lung 2: Demonstration (Social Action):** This is the act of living out and embodying that justice through concrete actions.

This concept is reinforced by a quote from Michael Adam Beck and Stephanie Moore, who argue that Jesus integrates "evangelism, justice, and church planting" through the creation of a community that heals, liberates, and acts together. This integrated breathing is linked to the Hebrew word *ruach*, the creative and life-giving breath or Spirit of God.

## V. The Practice and Application of Justice

The final section of the sermon translates these theological concepts into practical application, emphasizing the immediate and active nature of justice work.

- **The Immediacy of the Kingdom:** Drawing on United Methodist theology, the document rejects the idea of God's kingdom as only a distant, future reality. Instead, it is seen as "unfolding here and now," with believers called to "usher in the kingdom reality" on earth.
- **The Additive Nature of Justice:** A key principle is that justice is not the absence of injustice, but the presence of a positive, completing force. This is illustrated with several analogies:
  - We do not remove darkness; we fill the space with **light**.
  - We do not remove cold; we fill the space with **heat**.
  - We do not remove death; we fill the space with **life**.
  - We do not remove injustice; we **give justice** and **live justly**.
- **Redefined Mission and Salvation:** The Christian mission is reframed away from a singular focus on post-mortem destiny.
  - The job is not to "rescue people from hell" but to "lead people to heaven," which will "inevitably lead them out of the 'hells' that they live in" now.
  - Salvation is defined not just by what one is saved *from*, but what one is saved *to* and *for*.
- **The Foundation of Action:** The work of justice begins not with legislation but with daily, interpersonal actions like kindness and compassion, treating all people as sacred. The ultimate catalyst for this work, according to Dr. Works, is the profound realization that "we are known and loved by God." The final challenge is to experience this truth personally and then extend its proclamation and demonstration to others.

## Discussion Questions:

1. How does understanding justice as restoration and healing change the way you think about God and the Gospel?
2. Where do you see injustice today that cannot be solved by individual goodness alone but requires healthier systems or shared action?
3. Which of Jesus' actions or priorities in this teaching most reshapes your understanding of what "faith in action" looks like?
4. How might worship become more than private spirituality and instead shape how we see power, fairness, and care for others?
5. Which comes more naturally to you—talking about faith or living it out through action? What might it look like to strengthen the other "lung"?
6. Which comes more naturally to you—talking about faith or living it out through action? What might it look like to strengthen the other "lung"?