

WEEK OF MARCH 12



DAY
1

Just God, Just People

Genesis 18:19, 25; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Micah 6:8

Be sure to look up the verses listed and read them. If you are not familiar with the books of the Old Testament, use the table of contents in your Bible to find them. Bible apps will take you to the verse when you type it in a search window.

There are few themes of more importance than that of justice and righteousness. God is a just and righteous God. God wants his people to be just and righteous. God wants society to be a place of justice and righteousness.

Personally, we are all interested in having justice, fairness, equality, freedom, security, safety, and rights. These themes are core to the Judeo-Christian faith, and out of that faith, Western civilization would increasingly build them into the fabric of societies and nations.

The theme of justice is often divisive. Why? Many Christians act as if they don't believe in or want justice! Why would we ever believe or act that way? The Golden Rule applies when it comes to justice. What we want FROM others, we should want FOR others. We should give to others, and not just a few others. Nor are we to be selective in who we desire to have justice. Justice is for all. That is profoundly biblical.

God is just and those who worship and follow a just God are told to be just. Sometimes Christians get upset with the language of social justice. Instead, they want "biblical justice." That's great, because justice in the Bible is a relational issue. Justice is what people give or take away from others. Justice is how we live, or not, with others. Biblical justice is not a personal thing for the individual. When the Bible talks about justice it is justice for people, for groups, for entire societies, and, in fact, for the entire world.

Abraham was called to be the father of a just people who would seek justice. The Book of Revelation reveals the just judge of the earth bringing the final word on justice for all (Revelation 15:3; 16:5, 7; 19:2, 11).

DAY
2

A Just Society

Deuteronomy 16:19-20, 24:17, 27:19, 32:4; Exodus 23:1-9; Leviticus 19:15

Remember, Deuteronomy is the story of God creating a new society. This new society is known as the people of God. This new society is to be unlike any other society in that ancient world. This new society is to be totally committed to freedom (for they were slaves), justice (for they were oppressed), and flourishing (for they suffered greatly). God constantly tells them to remember what life was like in Egypt so they will clearly see the new way of life God has for them.

Life has always been hard, but in the ancient world it was often terrible. Life has often been "not fair," but in the ancient world it was often hopeless. People have rarely been treated as equals, or with respect and dignity. People have always been at the mercy of those who have advantages, resources, skills, opportunities, and the will to maximize personal gain at the expense of others.

God is creating a new kind of society with new beliefs and values, and a new purpose. God is creating a society where people look out for one another, care for one another, and give extra TLC (and justice) for the disadvantaged. In Deuteronomy, God gives specific instruction on how to do that.

In part, it will be through wise, compassionate, and just leadership (rulers, elders, prophets, priests, and courts

[Deut. 17]). In part, it will be through social systems and laws that cancel debt, free servants/slaves, and restore land, and through generous giving, taking care of those in need (Deut. 15). In part it will be through a code of law to protect the innocent, the poor, and the oppressed (Deut. 19-21).

This is HOW God will bless his people. And as the people of God are blessed and are a blessing, they are also a witness to the nations of the far better way of life God wants for the world.

DAY
3

Justice in Action

Amos 5:18-27; Micah 6:8

Today, as we dive deeper into the Old Testament and the prophets' teaching of justice, we see God's response when his people have abandoned his imperative of justice.

Justice is undoubtedly important to God. The prophet Isaiah speaks about justice 30 times, describing both God's relationship to it, "my justice will be a light to the nations" (Isaiah 51:4), and his command to enact justice, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed" (Isaiah 1:17). Theologian Christopher Wright speaks to why both are important when he says, "In Old Testament thinking, righteousness and justice are actual actions that you do, not concepts you reflect on or an ideal you dream about."

Read Amos 5 for a real-world example of this. In this difficult chapter, God has become sick of Israel's worship, "I hate, I despise your religious festivals" (v. 21), "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps" (v. 23). Harps aside, it's pretty easy to insert our regular Sunday worship time into what the prophet is describing here. It is not that God no longer wants our worship, but worship detached from biblical justice simply is no worship at all in God's eyes. Instead, he says, "But let justice roll like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (v. 24).

Micah 6:8 famously asks the question we should all be asking this point, so we don't end up in the same situation as Israel: "And what does the Lord require of you?" The answer: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Do an honest self-assessment. Is justice an action you do or a concept you reflect on? Pray that God will move your heart closer to that of Micah 6:8 this week.

DAY
4

Seeking Justice for the Oppressed

Matthew 11:1-6; 25:34-40

When we move into the New Testament, Jesus shows a special concern for the poor and marginalized in society. Before Jesus is even born, Mary's prophecy states that Jesus will pay special attention to the poor but send the rich away (Luke 1:53).

Jesus' ministry is especially focused on those without power. In Matthew 11:1-6, when John the Baptist inquires if Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus himself points to how he fulfills prophecy by how he heals physical ailments and proclaims the good news to the poor. Later, in Matthew 25:34-40, we learn that those who are righteous have shown special concern for issues of justice:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

As followers of Jesus, we emulate his concern for justice. God is greatly concerned with those who experience oppression here on earth. To represent Jesus well, we need to be involved in seeking justice for those who are mistreated. We work to make our society a place where all people can experience flourishing. When we work for justice in our community, we serve Jesus, who shows special identification with the poor. When we serve those experiencing injustice, we serve Jesus himself.

How can you help those experiencing injustice here in York? Who needs our special care and attention?

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP CONVERSATION

Before you dive into this week's group questions, start with a few moments of catching up. How was your week? How can your group pray for one another? What was one thing that brought you delight this week?

ONE: There are few issues more important or more divisive than that of justice. Every follower of Jesus needs to be much more intelligent about the biblical teaching on justice. There is a short and readable book we highly recommend: *Generous Justice* by Tim Keller. Have you read any other books or heard any messages that have influenced how you think about justice?

TWO: Many Christians seem to either ignore, or even resist, being committed to justice in our society. Why do you think that Christians are like this when the Bible is so clear on the importance of justice? Do you think that you ignore or resist justice issues?

THREE: Do you have any memory of a time when you were treated poorly? Think of a time when you were NOT treated fairly. You did NOT get justice. Think about that experience. How typical or how infrequent was that experience in your life? What did you do when you did NOT get justice? Can you imagine if much of your life was spent being treated unfairly and unjustly? What do you think that would be like?

FOUR: Why do societies have to work so hard at justice? Why is it so easy for injustice to prevail? By the way, don't just say SIN. What are the ways that sin goes to work that lead to injustice?

FIVE: What do you think are the most pressing justice issues in our community? How do you think that Christians should get involved in seeking justice for our neighbors? What tangible steps can you take?

As a group, read Micah 6:8. Use the words of this verse to shape your closing prayer time. Pray that God will help you to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly this week.