

Hope Church February 22nd 2026

What really matters? JUSTICE

Matthew 23:23-24

We're starting a three-week series called ***What Really Matters***. And we're anchoring it in something Jesus said that should make **every church person a little UNCOMFORTABLE**. Before you walk out today or call the theology police, hear what Jesus says about JUSTICE.

I shared a couple of weeks ago about my friendship with Peter. How our friendship taught me that *I am born racist*. But following Jesus means a lifelong intentional process of letting God **reshape my heart and mind and attitude** – especially towards those who are different than me.

One of the questions he pushed on me was this: Would my **view of justice change** if my story changed? If I had a different skin color? If I grew up in a different culture? If I lived in a very different daily reality?

During that time, I came across an ARTICLE WRITTEN TO **white South African Christians** living in a post-apartheid country. The article asked a piercing question:

How would I see justice if I were black?

We'll unpack JUSTICE in four simple movements.

- What Jesus exposes – **EXPOSE**.
- What our culture assumes – **ASSUME**. You know what people say about assume...?
- What God reveals – **REVEAL**.
- What do we do – **DO**.

Movement #1: what Jesus exposes?

If you have a Bible or the Bible app, go to **MATTHEW 23**.

- Jesus is talking to the **Pharisees**. The super-religious leaders of the day.
- Jesus is *confronting* them: **You're putting in all the effort, but you're missing the point.**

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you HYPOCRITES! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have *neglected* the more important matters of the

law — **justice, mercy** and **faithfulness**. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Matthew 23:23-24 NIV

- Jesus EXAGGERATES to bring his message home. The camel was the **biggest land animal** they knew. It was *considered unclean*.
- The religious leaders in Jesus' day took **rule-keeping to the extreme**. They didn't just follow the rules. They added extra ones to make sure they LOOKED PERFECT. 613 of them.
- The law said to **give ten percent** of your main crops and animals.
- But they went so far that they even measured out ten percent of tiny things like **herbs in their kitchen** – mint and dill and cumin.
⇒ Picture how stupid this was: someone **carefully counting little leaves to hit ten percent** while a hungry widow on their street has nothing to eat.
- Jesus isn't trying to say that the small stuff doesn't matter. Jesus is saying it's a problem when you make minor details THE MAIN THING. When you **ignore what really matters**.
⇒ It's *fussing over your spice jars* while turning a blind eye to injustice.
⇒ *Cleaning up your drink* while **ignoring the brokenness** right in front of you.

- Jesus is straight with them: not everything weighs the same in God's heart. Some things matter more.

Jesus exposes: You CAN BE **religiously meticulous** and at the same time BE relationally blind.

Movement #2: what our culture assumes?

Everyone today talks about JUSTICE. It's everywhere. On **social media** and in **classrooms** and in **politics** and in **conversations** and in **protests** and in **documentaries**.

JUSTICE matters deeply to our culture. Everyone has their own opinion.

But the question we need to wrestle with: What kind of JUSTICE are we talking about?

Because not all JUSTICE **starts in the same place**.

For most people when they hear the word JUSTICE, they think fairness and equality and protecting people. And to be clear – *those are good instincts*.

- Caring about fairness is GOOD.
- **Standing against abuse** is GOOD.
- Protecting people MATTERS.

Christians should hate injustice.

But here's the *deeper* question: What is my JUSTICE rooted in?

Movement #3: what God reveals?

- There are basically two ways to build a JUSTICE system.

The first option is a **me-centered JUSTICE.**

⇒ It about my rights and my truth and my identity and my freedom and my choice.

⇒ What am I **entitled to?** What makes me **feel validated?**

⇒ In this way of thinking, JUSTICE is centered on me.

⇒ The highest good is my **personal choice.** The highest good is my **personal freedom.**

That's the world we are living in today.

But there's another way to think about JUSTICE: **a God-centered one.**

⇒ When JUSTICE doesn't start with me – not my **preferences** or my **desires** or whatever is **trending in culture.**

⇒ When JUSTICE **starts with God.** Where the highest good is **God's holiness.** Where the highest good is **God's will.**

⇒ JUSTICE is when God is setting things right.

That is completely different from the world sense of JUSTICE.

Modern day JUSTICE asks how does this affect me?

God's JUSTICE asks **how does this reflect God?**

And this is why JUSTICE **can't** just be about my comfort or the flavor-of-the-month-philosophy.

- If JUSTICE is built on what people want, it's going to **change every time culture shifts**.
- If JUSTICE is built on **God**, it's anchored in Someone who *doesn't change*. An Old

Testament **prophet named Malachi** wrote:

I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Malachi 3:6 NIV

- JUSTICE is not supposed to be rewritten every decade. Is not supposed to be **rewritten by whomever is in power**.
- JUSTICE flows out of who God is.
- JUSTICE isn't a **trend for God**. JUSTICE is **part of His nature**. It's who God is.

Does that mean that we as Christians don't have to care about human rights? NO.

It means we **care even more** than human rights do. But we care for a different reason.

The Bible says in **GENESIS 1:27** that *we're made in the image of God*.

- That means a person's value *isn't based* on **income** or **performance** or **popularity** or **influence**. OUR WORTH comes from the fact that we reflect God.
- That's why the Bible *keeps calling God's people to care for* widows and orphans and the poor and the immigrants and those who are pushed aside. Not because it's trendy or gets applause – but because **they carry God's image**.
- When Christians stand against injustice, we're **not just defending rights**. We're *honoring the image of God in other people*.

And this is where it starts to feel uncomfortable. GOD-CENTERED JUSTICE doesn't just protect the vulnerable — it also **confronts what's wrong**.

- Modern JUSTICE often says: If it's not hurting anyone, it's fine. You do you.
- But God's JUSTICE says something different.
 - ⇒ If it **dishonors God**. It matters.
 - ⇒ If it **uses people**. It matters.
 - ⇒ If it **misleads people**. It matters.

⇒ If it **twists something created for good**. It matters.

That's the difference between God's justice and our justice.

- Sometimes what our culture celebrates, **God calls broken**.

⇒ Our *culture celebrates* any kind of sexual expression as long as it's consensual. But the Bible points us back to **God's design for sex and marriage**.

⇒ Sometimes *culture applauds* ruthless ambition as success. But **God calls it idolatry** and warns how it **harms other people. Especially the vulnerable**.

This isn't just something out there in other people — it shows up in me too.

- And sometimes what culture shrugs at – or what my own comfort resists – **God calls holy**.

⇒ God-centered justice will look like forgiving an enemy instead of getting even.

⇒ God-centered justice will look like **staying faithful in a difficult marriage**.

⇒ God-centered justice will look like *telling the truth when a lie would be easier*.

This is where we struggle.

⇒ We like compassion. But we don't always like **holiness**.

⇒ We like mercy. But we don't always like **accountability**.

But God's JUSTICE holds both together. And at **the cross we see it most clearly**.

⇒ At the cross, God didn't ignore evil.

⇒ He **didn't redefine** RIGHT and WRONG.

⇒ He *absorbed it*.

God did not PRETEND our wrong never happened. He **pays for it Himself** and then **invites us back** into His family. At the cross, *JUSTICE and mercy meet* – fully.

- At the cross JUSTICE **was satisfied**.
- At the cross mercy was given.
- At the cross *reconciliation became possible*.

That is God's justice.

Moment #4: What do we do now?

Let's go back to **MATTHEW 23**. Jesus isn't talking to atheists here. He's talking to deeply religious people. They **tithed their spices**. They followed the rules. They looked PERFECT on the outside.

But Jesus warns them – *they were missing God's heart.*

And that's the warning for us today. You can attend church. You can **post Bible verses**. You can *use the right Christian language* and still have a view of JUSTICE that **quietly revolves around yourself.**

- We live in a world that constantly tells us: define yourself. **Speak your truth**. Protect your rights. **Follow your heart**.
- Deep down, we sense something isn't right.
- If JUSTICE is **built on broken people deciding what's true**, we will stay confused and divided and broken. Look around at what's happening in the world.

But when JUSTICE is anchored in a holy God who designed us, we finally have something solid to stand on.

God-centered JUSTICE looks like this in everyday life?

- ⇒ It refuses to cheat even when no one would know.
- ⇒ **Stepping in** when someone is being mistreated or power is abused.
- ⇒ Choosing not to gossip.
- ⇒ Not reshaping what Scripture teaches just to gain CULTURAL APPROVAL.
- ⇒ Caring for the poor **without turning them into projects**.

⇒ Loving people deeply without calling good what GOD CALLS DESTRUCTIVE.

But God-centered JUSTICE doesn't stop at behavior. It keeps *moving us toward*

reconciliation — toward *repairing what sin has broken*. Just like God did on the cross

through Jesus. MIROSLAV VOLF captures this well:

The goal in pursuing JUSTICE is not only that JUSTICE happens, but that

reconciliation happens too.

You can't have real JUSTICE if everyone remains enemies.

- *Reconciliation* means **telling the truth about harm**.
- *Reconciliation* means working to make things right.
- *Reconciliation* means *refusing to let revenge shape the future*.

God-centered JUSTICE isn't loud.

God-centered JUSTICE **isn't performative**.

God-centered JUSTICE isn't self-righteous.

It is **steady** and **holy** and **compassionate** and **truthful**.

It doesn't **produce** arrogant people. It **produces** humble ones.

Because we know that if *strict justice were applied to us*, we wouldn't **make the cut**. It wouldn't only expose others — *it would expose me too*.

The question isn't simply: *do I care about justice?*

The real question is: **where does justice begin for me? With me — or with God?**

When JUSTICE begins with God:

- The vulnerable are protected.
- **Truth is not watered down** — sin is named and confronted.
- Compassion is not lost — mercy is still offered.
- And **real reconciliation becomes possible**.

That's the kind of justice Jesus calls weighty.

And that's the kind of justice that can **RESHAPE** a life and a family and a church — even a community.

And if you're here today and wouldn't call yourself a Christian, this might feel heavy. But here's the good news:

⇒ God's justice is not aimed at your destruction — it's aimed at your restoration.

- ⇒ Your first step isn't fixing everything broken in your life. It's coming to Jesus.
- ⇒ Stepping into that place where justice and mercy met — the cross.
- ⇒ Trusting Him even with your questions.
- ⇒ And letting Him begin making things right from the inside out.