

About Justice

Intro: At One Life, we hold to a foundational conviction, and it is this:

- **We believe that scripture always leads us towards justice. All believers are called to do justice, correct oppression, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.**
- Furthermore, we unequivocally state that racism and prejudice are sin—they are direct assaults on the *Imago Dei*, the image of God stamped on every human soul.

Now, those words are easy to say. They sound wonderful on a mission statement or printed in a bulletin.

- But scripture does not allow justice to remain a abstract, cozy sentiment.
- Today, I want us to lean into a hard truth—one that cuts deep into our self-preservation:
- **Biblical justice will eventually cost you something.**
- Standing for the oppressed is relatively easy when it costs you nothing.
- It is easy to post a slogan, wear a wristband, or nod in agreement during a sermon when the room is friendly.
- But God's justice eventually brings you to a crossroad where you must choose:
 - o **Will you stand with the oppressed, or will you stay comfortable with the oppressor because it benefits you personally?**

Let's read what God's Word says through the ancient prophets.

- **Micah 6:8** -- *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*
- **Isaiah 1:17** -- *"Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."*
- **Amos 5:24** -- *"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."*

THERE IS A TRAP OF SELF-INTEREST AT THE OPPRESSOR'S TABLE

- Notice the verbs in these texts.
- Micah doesn't say "admire justice." He says **do** justice.
- Isaiah doesn't say "feel sympathy for the oppressed." He says **correct** oppression.
 - o And I love that in Isaiah 1:17 it begins by saying "LEARN"
 - o So much of our own prejudices are rooted in our ignorance.
 - o And we can't relate with the suffering of others because of the privilege, perhaps, of not experiencing what they experience.
 - o In other words it can be said, for many of you here -- **"A PROBLEM IS NOT A PROBLEM, UNTIL ITS YOUR PROBLEM"**
 - **An external issue remains distant and abstract until it directly impacts our lives, responsibilities, or well-being**
- Amos doesn't ask for a trickle of charity—he demands an overflowing, non-stop river of righteousness.
- **Amos 5 is explicitly and centrally directed at correcting systemic social oppression, corruption, and the exploitation of the poor.**
 - o **There was Judicial Oppression in the Courts (The "Gate")** In ancient Israel, legal disputes and business transactions took place at the city gate. In Amos 5, the legal system was rigged in favor of the wealthy
 - o **There was Economic Exploitation of the Poor** The ruling elite in Israel were amassing personal wealth by exploiting agricultural laborers and small landowners
 - o **There was Religious Hypocrisy as a Cover for Injustice** The Israelites in Amos's day were deeply religious—offering sacrifices, singing worship songs, and keeping religious festivals. However, God rejected their piety because it was paired with social violence

Why do these commands sound so urgent? Because human nature naturally drifts toward self-preservation and silence.--

- The easiest thing to do in a broken world is to remain silent when systemic injustice, racism, or prejudice works to your advantage.
- In ancient Israel, the religious elite kept offering sacrifices, attending festival gatherings, and singing worship songs—all while turning a blind eye to land-grabbing, racial and ethnic prejudice, and economic exploitation.
- Why? Because the status quo benefited them.
- When you benefit from a system that hurts someone else — whether through financial gain, social standing, safety, political access, or simply personal comfort — silence is not neutrality.
- Silence is, many times, taking the side of the oppressor.
- But I will also add that **noise for noise sake is pointless – and one can be louder with action than with words many times.**

The Prophet Amos exposed this fake religious performance in **Amos 5:21–23: *"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies... Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen."***

- God refuses to listen to our praise music if our hands are closed to the suffering of our neighbors.
- God despises our religious gatherings if we ignore the racism and prejudice targeting those made in His image.
- **God can choose to reject our devotions if our actions favor kings more than the oppressed and persecuted.**
- When we prioritize our personal benefit—our tax cuts, our social status, our peace and quiet, our tribal affiliations—over the dignity of the marginalized, we have traded the table of the Lord for the table of the oppressor.

>>The Prophet Micah spoke about oppression and justice in the book of Micah. <<

- Micah spoke so much about justice because **Israel's injustice was evidence that their relationship with God had become corrupt.**
- For Micah, justice wasn't a side issue—it was part of what it meant to faithfully belong to God.
- **God cares about how we treat people who are vulnerable to our power.**
- **Oppression can look like:**
 - o Taking advantage of someone because you have more power or resources
 - o Exploiting someone's vulnerability
 - o Taking what belongs to another person
 - o Using leadership for personal benefit
 - o Corrupting justice
 - o Ignoring the needs of people who cannot defend themselves
- Sitting and benefitting from tables of injustice and oppression, like with Israel, are not just a violation of social ethics ... **IT IS A VIOLATION AGAINST OUR COVENANT WITH GOD!**
- **The people of Israel knew they were unwell before God and so in Micah 6:7 they ask, and I paraphrase: **WHAT SHOULD WE DO to regain God's favor?****
- **Micah 6:7 -- Will the LORD be pleased with^[a] thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"**

Consider the story of Sophronia Farrington in 19th-century America.

- in the 1830s. She was a young New Englander with wealth, status, and a comfortable future.
- But as she read her Bible, God burdened her heart over the horror of slavery.
- While nearby churches insisted "Christians shouldn't get political" to protect their economic interests, Sophronia refused to stay silent.
- She surrendered her inheritance, comfort, and social standing to help shelter freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad.
- She faced imprisonment and social exile but she was convinced.

- When asked why she would risk her own freedom and status to help people who could give her nothing in return, she cited **Proverbs 31:8-9**: *"Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."*

Sophronia understood a crucial kingdom principle: "My comfort is not worth my neighbor's oppression".

AND THIS IS THE GOSPEL ROOT OF JUSTICE

Where do we get the power to live like this? We cannot manufacture this kind of sacrificial courage on our own.

- We find the power at the Cross of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ was the ultimate embodiment of standing with the oppressed at His own absolute personal expense.
- **Philippians 2:5-8**-- *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*
- Jesus had every privilege in the universe. He was in heaven, surrounded by perfection, glory, and honor. But He did not hold onto His privileges when He saw our bondage under sin and death.
- He left comfort. He stepped into our broken world. He identified with the outcast, the poor, the Samaritan, the leper, and the sinner.
- And ultimately, He was murdered by an oppressive system of state power and religious self-interest.
 - o This is who you and I claim to worship.

Because Jesus surrendered His comfort and safety to free us from our oppression, how can we, as His followers, hoard our privilege and turn a blind eye when others are oppressed?

- To follow Jesus means stepping out of line with the culture of self-preservation and stepping into line with God's heart for justice.
- I beseech you, friends, brothers and sisters. Those listening now and perhaps those hearing in the future -
 - **Let justice roll down like waters in our city, starting right here with us.**
- **Speak up for the downtrodden – help the neighbor in need. Speak up when there is injustice**
- **Lean in on the power of the Spirit of God to wield, NOT A SWORD OF DESTRUCTION, but the truth of the word of God which can bring life and transformation EVEN to the worst of oppressors.**