

Justice

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Date: 18 June 2017

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[0 : 00] Our theme this evening from Proverbs, we've been looking at Proverbs and this is probably the first time we've read a chapter in Proverbs that is typical of Proverbs, you know full of individual short statements, all not really linked, but we do find references to justice in this chapter, I'm going to mention them, but also towards the end. I'm just going to go quickly through some of the other individual Proverbs, very quickly just for your reference that mentioned justice. It's a huge area biblically, a really central and crucial area biblically is justice and I undoubtedly will disappoint many people tonight. I know that justice is such a huge theme and people of their own particular interest in different areas of justice and it can have a great deal to do with social activism or with global concerns or political pressures and all these things are valid when we think about justice. They're all important, they all come into our thinking when we consider justice. But what I want to do this evening is focus a little bit more on the personal application of justice biblically in your life and in my life as we go from day to day and I hope that that in itself would encourage a wider understanding and a wider interest in some of these geopolitical issues or whatever it might be that takes your interest in your thinking.

But can I ask you to keep in mind just for a short time, as we look at this this evening, the theme or not so much a theme but the background towards Proverbs, we know the theme is God's wisdom but the background is very much that it was written in ancient Near East, written from a king to children, to his children, to children of the king and it's seeking to inculcate into them the ways of wisdom and the path of wisdom and we know that much of it for us with the whole of the Bible points forward to the wisdom that's found in Jesus Christ and his person. So I'm going to do a broad, very broad brief biblical sweep and I'm going to end up in Proverbs so it's not a very conventional type sermon. I'm going to speak about four kings.

Well, I'm going to speak about kind of three and a half kings maybe the last one isn't maybe a king, children of the king, first three are kings, okay? And I'm going to speak brief, I'm going to tell you a story briefly, firstly, it's one you know well, if you know your Bible you know it, if you don't know your Bible you might not know it but it's I'm going to speak briefly about King David from 2 Samuel chapter 11 and 12 and it's relevant because he was a king and it's Proverbs of Solomon that we come through David's son but David was a great king and as a king in the ancient Near East he would have been one who ought to have gone to war with his people at the time when they go to war. They went to war and the king was to lead them but he should have been leading his troops, but he for whatever reason he chose not to lead his troops and he stayed back in Jerusalem and he was slobbering about on the top of his palace roof one day one evening and as he did so he saw a beautiful woman bathing.

You know the story most of you I hope and he really wanted her, he really wanted Bathsheba for himself and he said look I'm the king.

I determined what's right and wrong and so he summoned her and he slept with her and she became pregnant and her husband was at war where David should have been.

[3 : 52] So he summoned Eriah Bathsheba's husband home in the hope that he would go home to her and sleep with her but he had his own moral code and he said not while my people are fighting and my fellow soldiers are fighting I will not enjoy such luxury so he slept at the steps of the palace.

The second night David tried to get him drunk so that he would go home and do what he hoped he would do to cover up for what David had done and he wouldn't do it.

So David spoke to Joab the other commander in chief and said when you put Eriah back into the battle put him into the front line put him where the war and the fighting is the hottest then withdraw from him.

Can you imagine that? Withdraw your troops from him and he fell in battle so the problem was dealt with. He no longer had a problem with Bathsheba's husband and he took Bathsheba back into the palace to be his wife.

Now then of course you know what happened was that Nathan the prophet eventually came to David and told him the story as the king and he had to speak to David as the king and said I've got this matter that you need to deal with.

[5 : 16] There's this very poor man who has only one lamb in his household and he loves that lamb and he's brought up that lamb in his house.

I mean it's a very touching story his children played with the lamb. He almost regarded it like a daughter. This little lamb that was brought in the house the only lamb he had. And his neighbour was a rich man who had hundreds of sheep and thousands of lambs and when the rich man had a visitor instead of taking a lamb from his own flock to kill and to use in the feast.

He takes this poor man's one lamb. This poor man's one lamb. His only lamb. And he takes it to be used in the feast.

I mean David hears this. He's raged at the injustice. He's outraged that anything should happen like that. And the king, as the king he says this man needs to be called to account.

He needs to be judged. He needs to be brought to the place of judgment. And he should lose his life for what he's done. And you know what Nathan says, don't you?

[6 : 31] You're the man. You're the man. You're the one who did that. So Nathan's using this delightful parable, this story, to bring David to his senses and see what he had done to help him to see the injustice of what he had done that he was abusing his position, that he had misused the justice that he should have been dealing as the king and as the representative of God.

And he is the one who is guilty. And there's various appeals to justice in this story, isn't there? And we see difference, appeals to right and wrong, welling up in ourselves when we hear that story and when we think about what has happened.

And it's a reminder to us we all sense a need for fairness and justice and right and wrong. But often it's on our own terms.

David had, for whatever reason, he had allowed his conscience to be seared and we do believe from various of Psalms that are connected with the account that he actually knew he was guilty of what he had done.

He recognized it and he just silenced his conscience. He kept his conscience quiet and his conscience was seared. But nonetheless there's all different kinds of justice revealed in that story.

[8 : 00] And what is important is when God brings David to recognize that it is against God that the great injustice has been done. Not to say the injustice against Bathsheba and against Uriah and against Joab and against his people is meaningless.

But as David goes on to say himself, it's against you, you only have a sin. And that is the whole direction that the story goes in.

But we all have that sense of right and wrong, don't we? We all recognize that wrongdoing of whatever level deserves punishment, don't we?

Or do we feel that nothing deserves punishment in our lives? Possibly, until something wrong and unjust and unfair is meted out on us.

Until we're the object of the injustice, then we have this great sense from deep within us that something ought to be done about that, that there is right and wrong.

[9 : 08] And we recognize that. We recognize that in our DNA, in our very beings, there is this right and wrong and the sense of right and wrong, even though we recognize as believers from God's Word that it's a broken and incomplete sense of right and wrong.

But we must consider that. And I think much of our challenge for people and for society, people who aren't believers, our challenge is the thing about where this conscience comes from.

Not consciousness, but where does conscience come from? Where does the concept of right and wrong come from? Where is it? It's tremendously important to follow that through and to recognize that it is real and it does have a genesis and that justice is something that matters greatly.

And through the Bible, we recognize that His justice is the only justice and the only hope that we have in this world. But we, like David, I think in our lives, need to be shocked into recognizing that we are the ones often and that people who aren't believers need to come to the place where they recognize that it is not everyone else's failure and everyone else is wrongdoing against them, but it is that place where we find ourselves falling short of the justice and the goodness of God.

So we have King David and then we have the Divine King Himself. In this chapter 29 of Proverbs, at the end of the chapter verse 26, we have many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice.

[11 : 02] So there's this immediate recognition that the genesis, the very beginning of justice comes from the character and the person of God Himself.

Isaiah 30 verse 18, you can flick that up on the screen. Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you, for the Lord is a God of justice.

Blessed are all those who wait on Him. And that's the revelation that we have in the Bible of the character of God, God is love, but also God is just and is justice. He's the standard.

He is the person who is righteous. He is the beginning and end of justice. He is the author, the source, the measuring line for all of us so that God is justice in Himself and He is the author of justice.

So we recognize that this God in whose image we are made is the one who is just to whom we are accountable.

[12 : 05] But the rebellion of our hearts is from day one, has been to say, no God, you aren't just. You are unjust.

I'm right, you're wrong. You're in the judgment seat, not me. And we see that in our hearts often and in society.

We blame Him. We find fault with Him. We say it's not fair what you're doing. You're wrong. We are right. We have judged Him guilty for being God.

He is God. And we point the finger at Him and He's guilty. He is guilty for what He has done. He's guilty for being authoritative.

He's guilty for being sovereign. He's wrong about me. He's wrong about my heart. He's wrong about my motives. And my standard of goodness is good enough.

[13 : 08] He's wrong. God deserves to die. Not me. God deserves to be put in the dock. God deserves to be annihilated.

Not me. And that is in a sense what David was doing. He was crushing and silencing God and saying, God, I don't want to be judging me for what I'm doing here.

But it's often what we see, isn't it, in our own lives, when we feel God is unfair and unjust. We think He's the one who deserves to die. And we're intolerant and illiberal in our thinking about God.

I guess in some ways we've seen it politically over this last week with the resignation of Tim Farron, the liberal democrat leader who is a Christian.

And he has fallen very far short of the standard of the liberal elite. And they are saying, we're the ones who are right.

[14 : 13] We're the ones by whom you and others must be judged. And God and everyone else has fallen short of our standard.

But the challenge for us, and the challenge for us as we share our faith and the challenge for us in our own lives, is the recognition that before God He is right. Because if He's wrong, if He's unjust, then we are in a hell.

There is no hope. We might not always understand His justice. And we might not feel that we deserve to die. We certainly might not feel guilty or estranged from Him by our nature.

But we live in a world where death reigns and where God is rejected, where justice is a reality, but a broken reality, and where often He becomes the one who is blamed.

So the Bible makes clear that God is a just God, and we have fallen short of His justice by choosing to replace Him and stand or sit in His place.

[15 : 32] But that takes us to the third king, who is King Jesus. In Isaiah chapter 42 and verse 1 says, and prophesies of this Jesus, behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights, I put my spirit on him, he will bring justice to the nations.

Or Psalm 85 verse 10, which says, steadfast love and faithfulness meet, righteousness and peace kiss together. So we often take that and apply it to the cross of Jesus, where His mercy or His love and His faithfulness or His righteousness or His justice came together.

They both blended together at the cross. They kissed each other on the cross. Or Acts 33 and verse 13, speaking of Jesus.

No, I don't have that, okay. Where it speaks, I can just look that up, because it just speaks, it's quite a... Sorry, did I say Acts 33?

I hope you all noticed that there's not such a thing as Acts 33. Acts 8, 33. In this humiliation justice was denied Him. It's June, it's the end of the year, I'm tired.

[16 : 43] Who can describe His generous, for His life is taken away from the earth? In this humiliation justice was denied. So you see, at the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the prophesying of Him and the reality of Him and in the description of Him in Acts, justice is at the very core of it.

And if we fall short of God's glory and if death is the spiritual death and separation of the strangeness as the result of that, humanity, what hope is there for us?

And the hope is in Jesus Christ. Not that we believe in a gospel where we say, ah, it's fine, Jesus, I'll just forgive you anyway.

It doesn't matter. Because could you ever trust a God who didn't execute justice? Could you ever trust a leader or a political movement or the lawmakers of the world if they didn't execute justice, if they just let people off?

Justice is core to us. And we know the importance of it. And so when we speak about Jesus, we're not saying that justice was just ignored, but we are recognizing that something very important about God's character is revealed when justice and mercy kissed on the cross.

[18 : 15] Now, when we speak about the cross, we often speak about God's mercy and God's love and God's commitment and friendship to us, who, you know, what greater love has any man in this city lay down his life with his friends.

And that's tremendous. It's so important that that is the motivation between what He has done for us. But we're also saying that Jesus Christ, the only innocent one, denies Himself the justice of being set free and being regarded as innocent and takes the punishment of death, freely giving Himself over to death, condemned as unrighteous, condemned as guilty, condemned as dark.

So that sin is judged, wrongdoing is judged. Justice is meted out, but it's not on us if we put our trust in Him.

It's in Him. Can you see that really important piece of truth that love and justice are both dealt with on the cross?

His death on the cross and His separation from the Father means we are not any longer estranged from the Father or forsaken as we trust in Him.

[19 : 44] And so the cross does speak of justice. It speaks of guilt being dealt with and forgiveness being offered, and it reminds us that He comes back one day and we will all be accountable to Him because He is the standard.

And justice will be meted out. We spend a lot of our time as Christians just flinging up our hands and saying, how long or what's going on or where is God? What's happening?

Why is this like this? Isn't it supposed, what about the promises of God? And we do struggle with many things, but we trust that justice will be worked out and He will return and He will make sure that nothing unjust is allowed to go and punished in our world.

So lastly and very briefly, we speak about King Jesus and the Divine King and King David. And as believers, we've mentioned this before when we've looked at Proverbs.

We are children of the King. We are adopted into the family of God. We become believers. And as children of the King, the Proverbs that were originally written to the children of the King and that contain God's own wisdom remain relevant and important for us.

[21 : 13] And there's much in them that speak about the ethics of our Christian lives and how we live as a royal priesthood born into the family of God.

And there's two things very briefly, and with this I'm going to finish. The first is that Proverbs, and there's many, there's lots of verses that speak of justice and I'm going to finish with just quickly going through some of them because they're very practical.

But the justice that's spoken of has a common relevance in the world. The Bible speaks so much, and Proverbs especially, about the importance of justice. At a government level, at a law court level, it speaks of honesty, no bribery, punishing evil, protecting the poor and the disadvantaged.

It speaks against extortion, favoritism of the rich, fairness of wages, pursuing peace, despising oppression, protecting the fatherless and the foreigner.

And these are great truths about justice that Proverbs speaks of, and they're good for everyone. And when we think about our leaders and when we pray for them and when we encourage them, we want them to stand up for these common truths of justice because they're important just in society as part of God's common grace in our lives.

[22 : 33] But for every Christian, justice is important, not just from a spiritual point of view, not just from the cross, not just because we are guilty and forgiven by God, not just because He is the author of justice, but because we reflect Him and seek to reflect Him in our lives.

And can I say, especially in leadership, justice is a very important aspect in church leadership, political leadership, and every other kind of leadership.

But all of us should recognize and value the importance of justice in our lives and how we live. It does matter how we live, and I'm going to finish with this, because it's about knowing the Lord and knowing His will and knowing the kind of God He is.

If He's a just God, He wants you and I to be just people in our everyday living and how we live and how we think. So I'm going to very quickly flash up 10 of the Proverbs that speak about justice and just leave them with you, because they're very practical and they're very everyday for us as believers who understand that the cross is about mercy and justice, and that justice matters because who God is, because He is right and He is righteous.

Proverbs 2 verse 9, and you will understand righteousness and justice and equity and every good path, and that's part of the chapter that's speaking about the fear of the Lord or the wisdom of God.

[24 : 05] So we recognize that as we trust in God and as we follow Him, it helps us understand righteousness and justice and equity. These are important principles, and it comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we're a bit kind of fatty about our relationship with Christ. It's a bit pie in the sky. It's a bit ethereal. It's a bit vague and vain and emotional.

I'm not saying it shouldn't be some of these things, but there's some real grit and justice about our day-to-day living that we should apply because we're Christians. Proverbs 8, 20, I walk in the way of righteousness in the paths of justice.

So when it speaks about your walk, it speaks about your whole life. So in your tax returns, in your work ethic, and our concern for the needy, in our honest conversations, we're to be the kind of people that Jesus was when He walked this earth, and we need the Holy Spirit in our hearts and a prayerful dependence on God to do that.

Proverbs 17, 23, the wicked accept a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice. So bribery and corruption, that's not the way you live as a Christian.

[25 : 25] It's not the way that I should live in our businesses, in our finance, in all that we are. We are not to be cheating, and we're not to be doing things that are defrauding others because justice matters.

Proverbs 18, 5, it's not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous of justice. We're to discern the difference between right and wrong, and we're not just to be partial to one because possibly it may be advantageous for us to do so.

Proverbs 19, 28, a worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity. So the whole idea of being trustworthy and reliable and not being attracted to a path that is deviating from that, the importance of our words being truthful and what we say being trustworthy so that we're known as people in our families and in our lives, in our workplace, in our community, not as gossips and not as untrustworthy, not as liars, not as people who just make up things as we go along in order to cover our own backs.

But we are people who care about justice. Proverbs 21, verse 3, to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

So we move from a place of talking a good religious game to being people who have transformed hearts and who do righteousness and justice because we know the God of righteousness and justice and we seek to follow Him.

[27 : 12] And therefore all our religious sacrifices and efforts can be empty and we go out from singing His praises and worshiping Him and not living out our lives.

Proverbs 21, verse 15, when justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but a terror to evildoers. So as we live a straight life and seek justice and depend on God in our lives as Christians, it brings us a joy to our lives.

But sometimes a terror to other people because it is so different and should be so different from so much of what we see and experience in life.

Proverbs 28, verse 5, evil men do not understand justice but those who seek the Lord understand it completely. Spiritual insight, it makes perfect sense.

It makes perfect sense to follow God. The blindness has been lifted from us. It's not easy but it's definitely beautiful and it makes sense.

[28 : 25] The cross makes sense. Righteousness and mercy, kissing at the cross makes sense. God's love and God's justice being met in that act makes sense and we see it and it is important to us.

Proverbs 29, verse 4, by justice a king builds up the land but you exact gifts tears it down. Again, honesty in our family and in our society that brings us stability whereas greed is ugly and destructive.

And lastly, Proverbs 29, verse 26, many seek the face of a ruler but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice. So where do we find our ethics? Where do we choose them?

Where do we decide what's right and wrong? Is it just from ourselves? Is it simply the welling up of our own conscience? Which sometimes is, as we know, hugely unreliable.

Is it from others? Is it from society? Where are we gaining our thoughts and our ethics and our thinking about how to live? Where are we looking? Where's our heart?

[29 : 36] Where's our eyes? Where's our ears? And we believe as Christians, it's from the Lord that we get that, from understanding Him as a sovereign Creator and the great redeemer and the source and the beginning and the end of justice.

That is where we find our ethics. That's where we find our morality. And it's unchanging. It is not fluid. It is clear as the one who has made us we are to dig and search out for His justice through it all.

And we can only do that through Jesus Christ. And I think, Corey mentioned a couple of times in his prayer, that great requirement by grace that God asks for us.

As you go out tomorrow, as I go out tomorrow, he says, what is it that he requires? Under Christ, he says, to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly before our God.

It's very easy. We can all do that. Not. Unless we're reliant on the Lord Jesus Christ, but it's great, isn't it? It is simple.

[30 : 49] It's not easy to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly before our God. That's what God loves. And by His grace, let us strive to do that and seek to share His character and His mercy and His justice with a world that genuinely often just can't see it and needs to hear, you're the man, you're the woman, from God's own hand.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we pray that you would help us to recognize that in the myriad of mistakes we make and the injustice that we meet upon other people, the things we do wrong and say wrong and think wrong, remind us that while we do hurt people and we do break confidences and we do break promises and we do damage with people around us, remind us that ultimately there is a greater standard and there is a greater judgment because we are created by you and you are the author of justice and you are standard, your law of a jealous love for you and a sacrificial love for other people is one that we fall short of, we fail, we ignore, we reject by nature and it is only in Christ who has in voluntarily taken, in justice taken our sin, that we can be free and we can be forgiven and we can know justice.

So enable us to live by you and for you and to love, mercy, to do justice and to be humble in our walk before you.

For Jesus' sake, amen.