

Justice in a Broken World

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going to go back to the passage that Kirsty just read for us in Matthew chapter 12. And Thomas last week looked at Matthew chapter 11, and these two chapters, 11 and 12, are squashed in between two sections that deal with the teaching of Jesus.

So there's teaching, and then there's kind of more practical section, and then there's more teaching. And in these two chapters, we really find that Matthew is unfolding for us some of the people who rejected Jesus or were doubting Jesus.

Thomas last week looked at John the Baptist and his disciples who were doubting whether Jesus was the real Jesus. And this week, the Pharisees in the passage we read were questioning Jesus and trying to find fault with him.

And really Matthew is recording and recalling things beginning to go sour for Jesus, not just the crowds who were rejecting him, but here he focuses on individuals and on different groups of people.

And that rejection, which is highlighted in these chapters, it ferments a question in our minds, I think. Why would people reject Jesus? I mean, why would you?

[1 : 30] Jesus is perfect. Jesus is just. Jesus is loving. He's kind. Jesus is innocent.

And I mean that in the deepest and most theological definition of that word, without sin. It's profound, isn't it, that people would reject the only sinless man who ever lived?

And that kind of introduces a paradox into our own lives if we're Christians. And even if you're not a Christian today, it's a fascinating thought that begins to unfold in the Gospels.

Because it particularly us as Christians, we have sworn our lives. We've entrusted our eternal hope and our hope in this world also to one who is a reject, to an outsider, someone who is oppressed, who is despised, whose life was marked by sadness and opposition and prejudice, who suffered great injustice as we go on to recognize on the cross, and unspeakable isolation, not just from all of his enemies and his friends, but even from his father on the cross.

He's the strangest hero. He's no party animal, that's for sure. And there's not much record of celebration in his life, and there's many reasons for that.

[3 : 26] But we hear a great deal today about the gospel dance, about the victory, about the joy of the gospel and the peace of Christ, and of blessing and of abundance.

These are all great, these are all magnificent and central and important things, and we will come to that. But I wonder if we've forgotten how to lament, if we've forgotten how to grieve sin, if we've tied up our gospel into a neat, beautifully wrapped gift, but forgotten the nails, the darkness, and the cry of dereliction.

And we're living in many ways in grievous days, dark times, the virus which we all know about, and we've all experienced the fallout of that in our lives, especially in these last couple of weeks, the racial injustices that have been exposed in the killing of George Floyd, and the systemic problems that have exposed or have brought a worldwide backlash.

The institutional unpopular hate, the violence that seems to have stalked the corridors of social media, the conspiracy theories, the spare, seems to be coming at us from all angles, from nature, from circumstance, and from humanity itself.

And maybe we say, well, where is the gospel dance? Where is the joy? And I have to say, in these last two or three weeks, I have mourned.

[5 : 07] I've been in despair, I've been confused and conflicted as a human being and as a Christian. What is our response as believers into all that's been happening?

Well, I think we find helpful indicators in this passage, in this, certainly part of this passage, where darkness smolders against Jesus.

These pages, darkness is smoldering against Jesus. And I want to particularly look at verses 18 to 21, this prophecy from Isaiah, this remarkable prophecy from Isaiah 42, 1 to 4. And remind ourselves that they rejected Jesus. They rejected Jesus as king and he is God. And although he's rejected here, we recognize him and Isaiah recognized him and God through Isaiah prophesied of him that he would be the hope for the nations until the last verse that he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope, or the nations sometimes translated will hope.

[6 : 25] And he will proclaim verse 18 justice to the nations. Jesus is God's hope for the nations. And yet he's a divine outsider.

He's a king with no money and with no fame who went silently to his slaughter. And yet what we see from this and from further prophecies in Isaiah written hundreds of years before Jesus, but this was God's plan.

This is God in person as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Look at this, look at these verses, read them, soak yourself into them.

Open your Bible today if you can and have them opened at Matthew chapter 12 at verse 18. Because what we have in this section which is broken into poetic form as you can see it on the page is a summary of God's purpose and God's plan.

It's always been God's plan that Jesus would be the hope of the nations, that here is the Trinitarian God's plan, the score for the gospel dance.

[7 : 37] And this Old Testament prophecy drips with the approval and wisdom of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, singing in harmony as this prophecy is made of Jesus.

So you've got the, you know, because it's the fathers who's speaking here, Isaiah has been given this message from God about the coming Messiah.

And so God the Father is speaking here who sends his Son, Jesus, because he's speaking about Jesus who comes in the flesh, our representative.

Jesus the Son who denies all his divine rights. And God the Father loves him, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased, my servant whom I've chosen.

God the Father loves Jesus in the process of him being revealed in these chapters as being one who is hated and nobody. The Father delights in him while Jesus is becoming despised.

[8 : 44] And God the Spirit dwells in him, I will put my spirit upon him, he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. The Spirit revealing God's wisdom through Jesus Christ to a lost humanity.

And justice which he proclaims and mercy which is his belong to him, come from him and through him victory over sin and death in the grave is won.

That's where the celebration comes in. It's a costly celebration, but it's what brings us hope this morning. However, it does raise questions about God, doesn't it?

The nature of God, the character of God and our relationship with him. Why God had to make this plan to send his Son who would be rejected and who would die and yet speaking of justice and mercy to a broken and fallen world.

It does raise questions. So there's a couple of things that I want to say. First is that God is the one through Jesus Christ who proclaims justice.

[10 : 04] We see that in these verses, I will put my spirit on him, he will proclaim justice to the nations and then in verse 20 he will bring justice to victory.

In other words, he is the standard of justice. He is the judge of the living and the dead and the Bible is full of his calls for humanity to act justly.

These great words of Proverbs 31, speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly. Defend the rights of the poor and the needy.

And then these great words from Jeremiah 22, this is what the Lord sees, do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor, the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless of the widow.

Do not shed innocent blood in this place. Or Psalm 146, he upholds the cause of the oppressed, gives food to the hungry.

[11 : 03] The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord gives sights to the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous. He watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless in the widow, but he frustrates the way of the wicked.

Great verses, verses you could announce anywhere in this world in many ways as they marry the thinking of many today in their cry for justice.

But what we see is all these cries of injustice stem in humanity from a people who are made in God's image who is just, that we are moral and accountable beings, that justice isn't molecular, it isn't materialistic, it hasn't just evolved from nothing.

This sense that we have against oppression and greed and slavery and racism and prejudice, it comes from God. And we recognize and we can see that as we live our lives as believers and see justice and people's cry for justice.

But you know there's more, isn't there? The problem is that he is the just one, and yet he is forsaken. Jesus is Christ.

[12:22] Christ experienced all the injustice and all the oppression and all the prejudice and infinitely more at the hands of humanity. It was humanity's sins, your sins and mine that drove them to the cross.

The ugly sins, which means that in our cry for justice we are denied the right simply to be outraged at other people.

We must go further and we must let God's gaze land on our own hearts. And His standard of perfect love for Him and for others leaves not just humanity out there guilty but ourselves and me. His diagnosis is that I'm damned without Him. And this prophecy from the Old Testament reminds us of this justice and this salvation, this Messiah who is coming to put things right.

And that means I'm in conflict when I read about Jesus and when I live in this world. Because I look around and hear the cry of injustice from what has happened to George Floyd who says, I can't breathe.

[13:40] I cry, I cry, how long Lord? We see the inhumanity and we see sin destroying communities and countries all over the world, whether it's in America or in Hong Kong or whether it's with modern slavery or whether it's the voiceless cry of the unborn child, the greed and the violence.

Long for justice. But when I stand in the searing light of His gaze, I'm conflicted.

Why? Because before God, I see my knee on my brother's neck.

It might not be blatant and obvious before others but before God's gaze, my selfish heart, I know harbours lovelessness to others.

And so every racist, proud, prejudiced, judgmental, selfish, arrogant, lustful, dark, sanctimonious, vengeful, hating, lying, greedy, gossiping thought that never saw the light of day but that colours your and my vision.

[15:05] Leaves us guilty before God's justice. And that's without even touching our disdain for God's glory, for worshiping God, for giving Him first place in our lives and for loving Him.

See, I think there's a great danger for us in the Christian community. Yeah, we've heard a lot in these days about chlorinated chicken but I'm much more concerned, although that is a concern, a much more concerned about a chlorinated Christ who we have washed clean of any dirty stain of my sin, a nice, gentle, inoffensive Jesus who sits beside me with all my good works and allows me to blame others and even to blame God as long as I'm kept out of the frame.

But His justice won't allow for that, without Jesus Christ we stand condemned as hell and it will out there is a judgment day.

So His justice is searing. His justice is something that we mirror even in a broken way but it must point us to His perfection and our need.

And that brings me to the second point is that as He proclaims justice, He embodies mercy towards us. That is the gospel, isn't it? It's not just that He is just.

[16:38] It is that He is also merciful and that's where the cross and the gospel come beautifully together where righteousness and justice and peace and mercy come together and kiss beautifully.

And we have, going back to not just the prophecy that we have here but what Jesus says in verse 7 where He is exposing the hypocrisy and the self-righteousness of the Pharisees.

We haven't really had time to look at this and we can't today. But He takes another prophecy from Hosea chapter 6 and verse 6 which was given in the context of the same kind of self-righteous hypocrisy and He says, look, I'm not so interested in all your religiosity in your works.

He says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. He says, I don't want your blood. I don't want your works to try and earn favor with me.

My blood is sufficient. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. And the mercy of God is what transforms our whole outlook to the troubles and difficulties of today but also to everything in life because He transforms us and He transforms our perspective because of His mercy.

[18:00] So in this prophecy of Isaiah that speaks about the Messiah and His justice and His victory and His message to the world, He says He is the one who didn't quarrel or cry aloud.

You'll not hear His voice in the streets and He went to the slaughter silently. But a bruised reed, He says He will not break. A smoldering wick, He will not quench. I wish I had more time to preach on this and spend more time with it.

But this is the Savior that He is. He takes my conflict that I feel the despair, the helplessness and the guilt and He dies for it. He dies for my sin and my shame and my failure and for the dark night of my soul.

My failure to love Him and love others perfectly. He paid the price. He took the punishment. He served the sentence because He loves me and He loves you and He is full of mercy and He knows exactly in all His justice.

He knows what we're like and He invites us to Himself and He asks us to entrust ourselves to Him and to His salvation and to His finished work for us.

[19:07] And He then protects us and strengthens us and notices us. And He sees that we are nobody. You know, who notices the bruised reed at the side of the river or the tiny little small bit of candle that's burning out?

Nobody sees that. Nobody's interested in keeping that little flame alive. But here's this great picture of Jesus Christ who notices and who protects and who redeems and who saves the nobodies.

And our perspective is that we therefore open our arms to the bruised reeds in justice and in love and in mercy one at a time. We empathize.

We show mercy because we've received mercy and we live mercy. It transforms. Because we've received mercy, it transforms our whole perspective on the world and the way we think and the way we respond.

But it transforms not just our perspective but also our action. I desire mercy, not sacrifices, He says. In other words, mercy motivates our longings and our actions so that justice does matter because we serve a just God, a just God who is merciful and who on the cross satisfied His divine justice against us and our guilt and also His love and mercy in becoming our substitute and the one who is punished in our place.

[20:47] But that speaks of the reality that every sin will be paid for. There is a judgment seat and therefore we can't be indifferent either to our own sin or the injustices and the oppression in the world in which we live because of the cross.

But we must show mercy in our call for justice. We must be humble in all our understanding of the world in which we live.

We realize other people will fail and our call for justice must seek to be redemptive and restorative, offering people a way back.

We can't justify or go along with the violence and the self-righteousness and the expunging of history and the self-destructive bitterness that is marking so often these cries for justice.

So it transforms our action because we are motivated by mercy and it also transforms our hope, our hope.

[21:55] Verse 21, and in His name the Gentiles will hope. He seemed to be, at least I find them very hopeless days.

And we ask where is our hope coming from? He is God. Our hope is in Him, in Jesus Christ and what He's in. There is a purpose.

He is not slow in keeping His promise. He will bring justice to bear. Every wrongdoing will be accounted for and paid for either on Himself on the cross in our place or on that last great day, that great asides.

Every wrong will be righted. Gee, God says in this prophecy that He speaks of His Son about in glorious terms, He says, I have a dream.

I have a dream. It's a dream that's sealed in the blood of His Son and guaranteed in His resurrection that we thought about with the children.

[23:02] And His dream is expressed in these great words of 2 Peter 3, but in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

For even greater words of Revelation 21, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

That is our hope. That is our dream that we recognize. Not a wish fulfillment dream, not a pie in the sky dream, but the reality of the prophesied living work of Jesus, His death, His resurrection and His ascension to the right hand of the Father.

That is our hope. And we are to live in such a way that incarnates that hope by how we live with our neighbor, how we look at them and how we think about them and how we protect the oppressed and the marginalized and how we deal with our own prejudices and with racism and with all the injustice that we see and recognize, but as we begin with our neighbor.

So today, I hope we stand with the black community at this juncture in history because of the deep seated and institutional racism that's been highlighted, we can do nothing else.

[24 : 50] But we do so with mercy and we do so under the gaze of God's eye, recognizing His own amazing grace to us who are guilty before Him and pleased that He gives us the power and the life and the strength to love Him as we are born again, entrusting our lives and our hope to Him and our sins being forgiven, that we see Him differently.

We love Him for what He's done and for who He is in Himself and therefore we love our neighbor as ourselves and we also love our enemy.

And that stops us from being crushed. And I leave you with these great words from the Old Testament, the Minor Prophet Micah. He's shown you, oh mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Father God, as we come to terms with the awesome, huge reality of the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God the Son incarnate.

God the Son in all His perfection nailed to a cross. As we consider the marvel of salvation and the reality and the genesis of justice and mercy, we are awestruck and we are awed by your glory and by your beauty and your majesty, by your mercy, by your transcendence, by your closeness and above all by the hope that the gospel brings into our lives.

[26 : 54] In these days that do seem bereft of hope, we do indeed have the reality of celebration deep in our soul and that gospel dance and that peace and that joy that comes.

But it's not flippant and it's not cheap and it's not easy. But it comes from an honesty and a searing honesty about our own failings, not only in our own eyes and in the eyes of others, but before God, but also the great mercy of God that He accepts us because He has paid the price for our failure. Today I rejoice in that truth. Amen.