

Hope for Justice

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[0 : 0 0] when I'm here, and it's because you guys are here. I feel like just it's such a huge privilege that I get to serve you as a pastor in so many ways and get to do life with you guys, and man, some of the most amazing people in Havelock and James City and New Bern and down Harloway and Cherry Branch just come here on Sunday, every single Sunday morning, and I'm so glad that we get to do this on a regular basis. So yeah, just wanted to say that before we get into it. So we've been in a series since Easter, and we've been looking at the resurrection, right? Easter's all about the resurrection, and looking at the resurrection, what it means for our lives.

And so far, we've looked at what it means for our work, how the resurrection impacts and changes our work, and also our relationships. Alan did a great job in packaging that last week, and today we're going to be looking at the subject of justice. The subject of justice. What is justice? It's the idea that we have. We love justice, the sense of fairness, the sense of equity, and this isn't something that like some of us care about. This is something we all care about. Everybody cares about this, even from a young age. It's not something we kind of grow into and we get when we're older. It starts at a very young age. Even kids, before they can even talk, they have this sense of justice, and they communicate that, right? When a little kid's toy gets taken away, even though they can't say anything, they cry. Why? Because they're communicating, hey, that wasn't fair. And some kids cry, and some kids hit and grab it back, right? And they're communicating, hey, that wasn't fair, and I'm going to show you that wasn't fair, and you deserved what I just did, right? And as we grow, we get better at expressing our disdain for injustices, even the smallest ones, you know? For the most part, we do our best as we get older, and we get responsibility, and maybe we become parents to create a world of fairness and equality, right? As parents, we, I don't know if you're like this, we make sure our kids get the same number of presents at Christmas. We're always like, okay, all right, Rory has four. We got to make sure Sierra has four. We got to make sure Asher has four. We got to make sure Riley has four. And if not, it's like, we got to go out and like try to make this add up.

But because here's the thing, man, how messed up would it be if like one kid got a bike and a go-kart, and the other one got tube socks, right? That would suck for that kid. That would be like the worst Christmas ever. You want to scar your kid for the rest of his life? Do that. His Christmas would be ruined, and probably you would like be dedicating him to some couch time in a psychologist's office later on in his life, you know? Imagine you being that kid as your other siblings doing like donuts around you, and all you can do is put on tube socks, you know, Christmas afternoon.

Wouldn't be that fun. And here's the thing, it's kind of a funny example, but like imagine being that kid, right? How would you feel in that moment? And if we're honest with ourselves, we would feel less valued. We would feel less loved. And that is what is at the heart of justice when we talk about justice and fairness and equity, is that if we love and value others, we will care about justice.

And this concept, this idea of justice, that it's because we, it's rooted in love and value, that's in the foundations of Christianity. We believe, the Christian faith says this, God created man in his image. Genesis 1.26, God said, let us make man in our image and in our likeness, which means a few things. It means a few things. It means one, we all have intrinsic value. Every single human being is an image bearer of God. That means we all have intrinsic value. We don't have differences in value. No, we are all of equal value in the eyes of God, okay? And the other thing is, is we all have inherent qualities that reflect what God is like. Our Father in heaven is perfect in love and perfect in justice, and that's how he's revealed himself throughout the Bible time and time again. So, to answer the question, why do we care about justice? Why do we value love and people? The logical progression for Christians is,

God is love, God is just, he created us, made us like him, therefore we too love others and care about justice. But what if you don't believe in God? What if you don't believe he exists? Man, it's really hard to get there. It's really hard to see how you can make a logical expression for how mankind created and started caring about justice at all. I mean, if you distill it down into its most simplistic form, it goes a little something like this. I am a result of a single-cell organism evolving over millions of years. Therefore, I care about justice. I'm not saying this to pick on anyone, right? If you believe in evolution, you're here, you're exploring faith, you're checking this out. Man, I don't want you to feel bad. I'm not shaming you into this. I'm so glad you're here. Hey, I have friends that believe in evolution and we have great debates around this. You can pull me aside later and say, hey, just that was a little too simplistic and there's a lot more nuance to that. I would love to have that conversation with you. I love that stuff. But hey, give me a break. I'm a pastor. That's my job. [5 : 19] My job is to try to overcome your obstacles to believing in God. But the point is that without God in the picture, it's hard to understand how mankind developed and develops into a sense of justice at all. But Christianity's argument is that this sense of justice comes from God. Now, the critic might say, wait, wait, hold on. Well, what about all the injustice in the world then, right? If your God is a God of justice and perfect justice and we're made like him, why is there so much injustice? That's a fair question. Where does that come from? The Bible has an answer for that too. It says sin makes us prone to practicing injustice. See, injustice isn't a reflection of God. Injustice is because of our rejection of God. Right from the start, mankind chose to move out from under the rule of God.

See, at the heart of Adam and Eve, the first human beings God created, the heart of them eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is this. They chose to become the judge of right and wrong for themselves and for others. That was one of the central things at the heart of that. They chose to become judge of right and wrong for themselves and for others. And guys, you know what? That is at the heart of every injustice. When we reject God, we are only going to head in one direction, more injustice and more judgment. And you know what? We've perpetrated this on ourselves. We're not innocent. And this problem isn't just Adam and Eve's problem. It runs through all of us. It cuts through the heart of all of us. We want to be the judge, the arbiters of what is right and what is wrong. We want to call the shots of what is good and what is evil. And so how does this work out? Well, we justify our injustice. We often wonder how people can be so evil. We look out there and we see people flying planes into buildings, molesting children, racism, the oppression of the poor, murderers. We think, man, how can they do that? And to be honest, it's because they don't see it's wrong. We learn to justify sin. We learn to justify it to ourselves. And you know what that does? It opens, and this is what Adam and Eve did, they opened this Pandora's box for all kinds of evil. Think of that man last year who killed Christian worshipers in Charleston, South Carolina, just because they were black. That guy thought he was doing something good. He didn't do that because he thought he was being evil. He justified. He put out a manifesto that said, this is why I'm doing it, and this is why it is okay and it is right. He believed those actions that he did were justified.

But you and I, we look at that and we say, no, no, no, that wasn't a just thing. That was an evil thing. And it was. You reflect on that story and you think this, man, if you don't believe there's any standard, you say, man, no, wait, there has to be a standard. We have to be able to call evil, evil at some point, right? But then let me ask you this, what is that standard?

In the face of heinous crimes, we feel like there should be some kind of universal standard for justice, right? If only there was a way to diagnose what is right and what is wrong. If only we could be handed down a list from on high to show us what is good and what is evil.

Ten Commandments, anybody? The law. And God's law shows us. That's what it's there for. It shows us the perfect standard of justice.

[9 : 15] See, when God made Israel his covenant people, what does he do? He gives them his laws to follow. He didn't just say, hey, let's covenant together. I'm going to be God. You're going to be my people.

I'll do whatever you want. It's no big deal. No, they were meant to be a testimony to the nations. They were meant to show the glory of God and that they were set apart and they belong to God. They were different. In order for that to happen, God had to define what justice and righteousness looked like. He had to bring them back into understanding what that was. So God said to them, here are some rules. And among them, it was things like you don't lie, don't steal, don't murder, don't cheat on your spouse, et cetera. And then in other places in the law, he gets a lot deeper. He gets

into details about caring for the poor and for the oppressed and for the widow and for the strangers in your land.

Basically, all the vulnerable in society that often get taken advantage of. And especially in that day, that's what they did. And that still happens today. That is why God gave his people a written law to follow. That law diagnosed the problem of what is right and what is wrong. It restored what had been lost when Adam and Eve ate from the tree. God said, you don't get to be the judge over right and wrong anymore. I'm giving it to you. Here it is. And when we look at the law, what we're doing is we're looking at God's standard for justice and righteousness. And see, guys, on the one hand, this is really helpful. It helps us diagnose injustice. But on the other hand, it doesn't help us because it doesn't make us more just. See, we know that because Israel, we know that it doesn't make us more just because Israel could never keep the law. They couldn't keep it perfectly. They were always messing up. They were always falling away from it. And then God had to send his prophets to remind them. The prophets were like law enforcers. They were coming and saying, guys, you're forgetting the law. You're oppressing the poor. You're oppressing the widow. You're mistreating. You're taking bribes to oppress those and benefit the rich. And the prophets were those guys calling out Israel's injustice all the time. They were indicting them all the time. You read Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Amos and all these guys. That's what was happening time and time again. Here's a little sample.

Isaiah 10 verses 1 to 2 says this. Woe. Woe is not like Keanu Reeves' woe. Okay. Woe, it means curse.

You be cursed to those who make unjust laws. Now, this isn't a prophet having a bad day. This is God speaking through a prophet to his people. Woe to you. You be cursed to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. God's looking at his people. He's looking at his people that he loves. And what he sees is injustice spreading everywhere. The powerful were picking on the weak. Guys, it says widows and orphans were being taken advantage of. They were being robbed. I mean, that is like getting to a level of being jacked up. When you can go and look at a person that isn't already down on their luck and say, you know what? I'm going to take advantage of this situation. I mean, I hope you get as mad as I do when you hear about telemarketers scamming the elderly, right? It's like, man, somebody do something about that. But this is like next level stuff that we're talking about here. Now, imagine if that was somebody close to you. That was a close family member, people that you loved that this was happening to. And we'd want something done, right?

[13:12] We'd want those dudes that were doing that brought to justice. Why? Because our love for them demands it. And it's the same with God. That's where we get it from. God is loving so he can't ignore injustice.

God is loving so he can't ignore injustice. Let's continue reading that same passage of Isaiah 10, starting in verse 3. God's saying to his people, what will you do on the day of punishment?

In the ruin that will come from afar, to him will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth? Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain. For all this his anger has not turned away and his hand is stretched out still. That's brutal stuff. God's like hot right now, right? He's like Denzel, man on fire mad. Every ounce of fiber in us that cares for justice right now is probably rooting him on. He's like, yes, God, those dudes robbing widows, robbing orphans, yeah, get after them. None of us would want it differently.

And what we see in this passage is God saying he has a day of punishment coming. That is a lot worse than a slap on the wrist. It's a lot worse than a life sentence in fulsome prison. There's no injustice that is going to go unpunished. God is showing us that justice deferred is justice denied, is not justice denied. God's showing us that justice deferred is not justice denied. For those in that day that were waiting for his justice, waiting for his justice, the orphan and the widow that were just getting beat down and taking advantage of and crying out to God and saying, God, where are you at? Where are you at? Man, this was like drinking from streams of living water because God was hearing them say, oh, he hears my cries. He hears the cause of me who's poor and weak and needy. And he says, you know what? He's going to reach out and do something about it. It's a hope for them.

It's a hope realizing you're not forgotten. You're not unloved. The father sees you and loves you and favors you. Check out Psalm 72. I love this. Give the king your justice, oh God, and your

righteousness to the royal son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice.

[15 : 42] Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people. Give deliverance to the children of the needy and crush the oppressor.

For he delivers the needy when he calls. The poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life.

And precious, precious is their blood in his sight. That's a beautiful, beautiful passage. You know what? It's really challenging to me. Here's why. Our cultural moment, we give honor and praise and favor to the wealthy and the strong and the self-sufficient. We love our celebrities and our athletes. We watch them. We talk about them. We imitate them. We dress like them. We wish we could be them.

You think about People Magazine. The issues aren't flying off the shelves because they're having all these interviews and photos about poor widows and orphans, right? That's not what's happening.

That's not what we naturally look at as people. We don't look for the poor. We don't look for the needy. We don't look for the weak. But God the Father, he is intentional about keeping his eyes on them. How often do you and I do that? How often do we intentionally consider and look at the poor and the needy and the weak? That's all around us. And what are we doing to fight for them? For too many Christians, our sense of justice has been dulled to simply this, like, rooting for the underdog. Hey, we're pulling for you. Hope it works out.

[17 : 25] Gonna pray for you. But God does so much more than that because God's justice is better than our justice. God's justice is better than our justice. What did that passage say in Psalm 72 that God does for the helpless? He delivers them. He defends them. He crushes their oppressor. Not only does he rescue them, he makes them prosper. He causes them to prosper, it says. God's justice is better than our justice because it leads to the helpless being blessed. And God didn't just keep sending warnings through his prophets. He wasn't up in heaven saying, man, hey guys, all you down there, I know you're being mistreated thinking positive thoughts up here, man. Sending positive thoughts your way. No, he doesn't do that. He intervenes. He steps in. Here's the thing, guys. God's justice went further, so much further than any man's justice. Jesus was the king who chose not to stay in his palace. He left his throne. He became poor. He came to live with us in our oppression. He was mistreated. He was rejected. He was murdered.

And you know what? None of this surprised him. None of that surprised him. He wasn't going along and saying, like, wow, people don't like me because of what I'm saying. What do I got to do differently?

You know, why are my friends mistreating me? And this guy, Judas, there's something a little fishy about him. That wasn't happening. Jesus knew what was going down. He knew what was going on, and yet he did it anyway. He knew his mission. Still, he chose to live under the hard hand of injustice.

And not only did he live under it, he willingly died under it, guys. But you know what? Three days later, he claimed victory over it when he rose again.

Injustice, sin, death, oppression, the grave. None of these things could hold him. This is the hope we have of the resurrection. When we think about the resurrection, when we think why it gives us hope for justice, this is why. And so you know what? Let's get back to Psalm 72 and read it again this time, knowing that it is pointing to the resurrected Jesus.

[19 : 52] I'm going to change the verbiage a little bit to bring it into present tense. You have given the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son, who is Jesus.

He judges your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. The mountains now bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness. He defends the cause of the poor of the people.

He gives deliverance to the children of the needy, and he has crushed the oppressor. Amen? This is not an old song of hope for God's people that one day a king will come to right all the wrongs.

This is a song that we sing for right now. This is a song that we live in. This is the song that the people of God declare with joy and thankfulness and exuberance.

He is the king. He is our king. And because of that, you know what he do? He calls us to follow his example. And this spurs us on. This spurs us on to see this justice also done today. We are a church.

[21 : 08] We are his people fighting injustice. And as we do that, it bears witness to the justice of Jesus and reflects who he is. And we do this as we care for the poor, the needy, the orphan, the foster kids, the addicted, the outcast, the unborn, all these things. I could go on and on and on. We fight for the cause of them.

So how do we fight? How do we fight? Well, one way is through prayer, right? We pray that God would come and intervene and end the injustices we see and don't see. This is the great prayer of Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The more the kingdom of God and his work is breaking into our present day, the more that injustices will be dealt with, the more that he, we're going to see his justice more tangible in its expression here on this earth, which is an awesome thing.

Amen. So we pray, but we also do this the same way Jesus did. We move to the places of injustice. We move toward the places of injustice, just like Jesus did. We fight injustice because Jesus did. And again, our fight is differently. Jesus waged war differently. It was forgiveness instead of fists. It was truth instead of tanks and grace instead of guns. Let's think about that and let's admit, man, it's hard to see how fighting that way is going to change anything, at least quickly, right? We want results now. I remember the first Iraq war, Operation Desert Storm. I mean, that thing was over before it started, right? The shock and awe, Storm and Norman Schwarzkopf, man, they like blew in and like blew out the Iraq army in a matter of days. It was crazy. We threw the power of the U.S. military at Iraq and they surrendered in no time. It's interesting when you think about that, how those, how like past victories give present hope. Because when we invaded Iraq again in 2003, I don't know about you, but I don't know anyone who thought like, don't know if we can win that one. Why, man? Like that memory of Desert Storm and what we did there, that was like, that wasn't too long ago. That was only a few years back. Past victories, man, they give us present hope. And man, if that is true, then Christians should be the most hopeful people.

U.S. military, pretty impressive, but it's never raised anybody from the dead. It's won lots of wars, but it's never been able to forgive a person of their sins and change hearts and give them eternal life. Here's the thing, guys. Every Christian is a witness of Jesus's victory. Every Christian's confession gives present hope.

[24 : 01] It's the confession that I was oppressed by sin and Jesus saved me. But here's the thing. It's also the confession that I was the oppressor. I was the sinner and Jesus still saved me. See, we, the church, we as Christians fight for the cause of the oppressed, but we also fight for the conversion of the oppressor. The reality is that every single one of us, every human is both the oppressed and the oppressor. Earlier, we talked about the laws God gave Israel to codify his justice.

Well, you know what? I named a few, but there were hundreds of them to keep. And God didn't treat it like a buffet. He didn't go and say, you know what? Just go and pick which ones you like. Just keep those ones. Everything's going to be cool. And he said, failing to keep any of his law meant you perpetrated injustice. Possibly against someone, definitely against God.

Now, we always think, hey, that's not me. I'm not that category. Wrong. We all are. We are all guilty of injustice against a just God. We are all guilty of injustice against a just God. Romans 3, 12, 10 to 12 says this, as it is written, none is righteous. No, not one. No one understands.

No one seeks God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. Let's jump down to 19. What does this mean? Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped.

Right? Getting back to, oh, no, I get to be the judge of right and wrong. Wait, wait, wait, God. No, no, no, that's not me. I'm the judge. I'm the arbiter of what's true, what's just, and what's unjust. No, every mouth stopped. The whole, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Our hope isn't to try to keep God's law perfectly to stay out of that injustice category, because that's hopeless. Our hope is that a just God could somehow not give us what we deserve. Our only hope is in a just God who gives grace.

[26 : 42] Will a just God let injustice go unpunished? I hope we've seen how, man, because he is loving, he has to deal with injustice. He can't do that. So how does he rectify that? Well, we see

that, man, the Father's grace and his justice converged at the cross. All our sin, all our injustice was put on Jesus, the innocent, just Son of God. Jesus willingly stood in your place. He stood in my place and took God's wrath for all the injustice we have committed and will ever commit.

And are you here today and seeing this for the first time? Is this hitting you for the first time? Are you seeing that you are not just the oppressed who needs help, but the oppressor who needs grace? And I want to call you, throw yourself on the mercy of God. Throw yourself on his grace in Jesus Christ. Throw, all you need to do is believe. Believe that he died for you. God sent his son to die for you. You and I, we deserve justice. But in Jesus, we don't get what we deserve. We get what we don't deserve. We get the rich blessings of the Father. In place of our sin, we are given Jesus's perfect righteousness. We are no longer defined by the identities of oppressed and oppressor. We are called forgiven. We are called redeemed. We are called restored. I'm going to have the band come up. For those of us who are following Jesus, we're going to take a moment right now to come to communion, search our hearts.

And if you've put your faith in Jesus today, man, for the first time, this is something you get to partake in too. This coming to communion, this is something we do as Christians. And as we come today, let's consider how God's love and justice met at the cross, right? We're celebrating his body that was broken, his blood that was shed. We're remembering that. Man, we didn't deserve his love and grace and forgiveness. We deserved his justice, but all we got was grace. All we got was his love.

Let's meditate on that. And as you do that, man, let it fill you with thankfulness once again. And also consider how the Father's justice and love started with sending his son. And we are the Father's children that he is sending out into the world to fight injustice. And in that same spirit of thankfulness, embrace that call and ask God to fill you with his spirit, to give you strength and faith for the work we're called to do to advance the kingdom and push back darkness. Let's pray together.

[29 : 42] Father, man, man, justice, when we dig down into it, is something that we want, but we quickly start to see how short we fall. And it can become a scary thing apart from you, apart from knowing your grace, apart from knowing that you sent your son to die for us. And my friends in the room that are struggling with this idea of faith in you and what that means, Lord, I pray that you would open their eyes and they would, they would understand this. They would know that you are both the God who is just and the justifier of many because of your son, Jesus Christ.

And I pray that we who are Christians would be reminded of that too and so thankful for your justice. Amen.