

Do Justice

Special Response to Protests of 2020

I want to take a break from our regularly scheduled programming and talk to you this morning about a topic that seems to be on everyone's mind. It's been quite a week. Everywhere you look there are renewed calls for justice. "No justice, no peace" continues to be a rallying cry shouted in the streets. And I think it's important to talk about justice in church for a couple of reasons.

One, there are a number of Christians who have taken up the cry – as there have always been Christians at the front lines of the fight for justice...just like, unfortunately there have always been Christians manning the battlements of oppression as well. I'm encouraged by the Christian voices I hear speaking up this time around. But I have to admit that I do have some concerns. I'm especially concerned that my white evangelical friends could have a tendency to "mission trip" this thing. We post the pictures, we say the things, we immerse ourselves in the culture...but then we go home, and what has changed? What are we doing to address our own hearts and our own sins for the long haul. So I think a deep theological understanding of justice is needed. Can we articulate *why* we are doing what we're doing?

Of course, then there are other Christian voices I've heard that say that we should not get caught up in matters of social justice, but should rather focus on sharing the gospel. As if the two were different things! A Christian friend of mine – a *white* Christian friend - posted on social media the other day that if we would all turn off the news for week and read the Bible instead, all of "this" would go away.

With respect, I would argue that all of "this" is the direct results of *not* paying attention to what the Bible has to say about justice. It's too easy – especially in radically individual America – to turn Christianity into a sole focus on loving Jesus and forget that *he* commanded us to "love our neighbor as ourself". So to be faithful to the gospel of love, we have to talk about justice.

Now, the current situation is related to racial justice. And rightfully so – what happened to George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor is infuriating. Heck, I'm still not over Tamir Rice yet! And I have elsewhere specifically addressed the unique racial sins of our country – most recently in last year's God at the Movies message on *Black KKKlansman*. You can revisit that.

But today, I want to talk about a more general theology of justice. In Dr. Martin Luther King's last sermon – which I read this week – he admits that racial injustice is part of a larger stew of things like poverty and class and war and a host of injustices. In fact, when he was assassinated, he was in Memphis, not for a race rally, but for a labor strike. Justice is a huge issue and it is an extremely biblical issue because – as we're going to see in the text today - God is a God of justice.

Now, there are dozens and dozens of scriptures we could turn to on this. **Micah 6:8** summarizes what it means to be a follower of God. It's very famous. It says, "... *what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*" So what does it mean to walk humbly with God? To do justice and love mercy. It looks like two things. It's probably not. The mercy is the heart. It's the motivation, the dynamic. And the justice is the life you're supposed to live.

And therefore, Micah 6:8 actually summarizes what it means to be a follower of God by saying, "...*do justice...*" It's not just something you believe, it's something you do. In that same sermon, Dr. King said, "Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God." (March 31, 1968)

So what does it mean to partner with God as a co-worker? What does it mean to *do* justice? What is that? Why is that so important? I want us to look at one Psalm in particular this morning for guidance. It's **Psalm 146:1–10**, let me read it for us...

1Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD, O my soul.

2I will praise the LORD all my life;

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

3Do not put your trust in princes,

in mortal men, who cannot save.

4When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;

on that very day their plans come to nothing.

5Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

6the Maker of heaven and earth,

the sea, and everything in them—

the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

*7He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.*

The LORD sets prisoners free,

8the LORD gives sight to the blind,

the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,

the LORD loves the righteous.

9The LORD watches over the alien

and sustains the fatherless and the widow,

but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

10The LORD reigns forever,

your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD.

This passage will help us. I think it will specifically help us under three headings: the life of justice, the God of justice, and how to live a life of justice before God.

First, The life of justice. Now the word “justice” doesn’t appear in this English translation, but it *absolutely* is here. When I told you Micah 6:8 says, “...do justice...” that word for justice shows up 200 times in the Bible. It’s the Hebrew word *mishpat*, and it’s much more common in the Bible that we realize, because when you’re reading the English Bible you’ll find this word is translated in very different ways in different texts. Sometimes it’s translated “uphold the cause”. Sometimes it’s translated “righteous”, and sometimes it’s translated “justice.”

And in **v. 7**, right in the middle, it says, “*He upholds the cause of the oppressed...*” Those two words actually mean God executes justice. He *does* justice. He makes justice for the oppressed. What does that mean? If it’s 200 times in the Bible, it’s an important theme. What does it mean to do justice? To do justice means to give people their *due*. Now essentially there are two parts to that. There are two ways of giving people their due.

One part is negative. One part is when people are doing something wrong you need to stop them. To stop them and to capture them and to punish them is to do justice. And if you just let people just go on doing bad things and they’re never punished, you’re not doing justice, right? That’s why, for example, **Leviticus 24:22** says, “*You are to have the same law [mishpat] for the alien and the native-born.*”

Do you see what that’s saying? It means the same rule of law for the foreigner as the native. It means the same punishments for the same crimes. There shouldn’t be any partiality, the same *mishpat*. So, *mishpat*, in some cases, means to condemn and judge and punish the evildoer, but justice has another side. Doing justice is not simply punishing wrong people. Doing justice also means to give the oppressed and the weak and the vulnerable their due. So for example, **Proverbs 31:9** says, “...*defend the rights of the poor and needy.*”

When you read the Bible, in so many of the places where the word *mishpat* shows up, you have four groups of people who are mentioned: the widow, the orphan, the alien (or the immigrant), and the poor. Scholars call these “the quartet of the vulnerable”, and these are people who are weak, they’re easily trampled upon and harmed. They’re vulnerable.

And so while one part of doing justice, according to the Bible, is to punish the wrongdoer. See? (V.9) “*The LORD...frustrates the ways of the wicked*”. But the other thing we’re supposed to do, as you can see, is to lift up the oppressed, to care for the most vulnerable classes of society. Now if you want to get an idea of what that means, you can go to the book of Job. The setting of Job is that Job believes he’s suffering unjustly, so at one point he looks at his life and he goes through how he’s living, and he argues to God that he does in fact live a life of justice.

And notice what that means to Job. In **Job 29:12-16**, he says, “...*I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him...I made the widow’s heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice [mishpat] was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger.*”
The immigrant.

Do you hear that? He says, “...justice was my robe and turban.” Which means, “It’s the way in which I live my life. Every day I was doing justice.” What does it mean to do justice? It means to care for the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the immigrant. But what does that mean? It’s not just to condemn the wrongdoer. It’s to lift up and to care for the weak and the vulnerable. What does that mean? It means two things.

First of all, it means you must not harm the weak and the vulnerable. You mustn’t kill them. You mustn’t maim them. You mustn’t imprison them wrongly. Notice, by the way, it says in **verse 7**, “*The LORD sets prisoners free...*” Now that cannot mean God sets *all* prisoners free, because some prisoners ought to be in prison, and if they weren’t in prison, that wouldn’t be just. Right?

But what is it saying? It’s saying there are many, many people in the world, many people in history, and many people today who have been killed, imprisoned, enslaved, and tortured just because they were getting in the way of some powerful person’s interests, and that’s *wrong*. To harm the weak and the vulnerable is unjust, *but* it’s not just unjust to harm the weak and the vulnerable; it’s also unjust to ignore them.

When you ignore the needs of the widow, the orphan, the alien, and the poor, you just don’t take care of them. You just don’t notice them. That’s not called a lack of charity in the Bible. That’s called a lack of justice. Again, Job makes this point, he’s made a list. Job goes on, in **Job 31** and says...listen to this list, (v. **13**) “*If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they had a grievance against me,*” ...” Two. (v.17)“... *if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless...*”

Three. (V.19) “... if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment [and have not warmed] him with the fleece from my sheep...”

Four. (V.21-22) “... if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint.” Why? Because, v.28, “these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.”

Did you hear what he said? “It would have been a sin to be judged. It would be *unjust* if I see people without food and I don’t share my food, and I see people without clothing and I don’t share my fleece, my wool, my clothing.” He doesn’t say, “Oh, that’s a lack of charity.” Charity is an option. It would be *unjust*; it would be a sin against God. He’d be sinning against the most high!

This is pretty strong. This is really strong. Doing justice has a negative side, which is to condemn and judge the people who have done wrong, but doing justice has a positive side. It means lifting up the weak and the vulnerable and caring for them. But it doesn’t just mean it’s unjust to harm them; it’s also unjust to *ignore* them. There is a translation of **Proverbs 14:31** by Old Testament commentator Bruce Waltke, that I quite like. He says, “*He who slanders the poor scoffs at his maker, but the one who is gracious to the needy honors God.*”

The words “scoff” and “slander” is a word that simply means to take lightly. And what that means is if you just ignore the poor, if you take them lightly, if you do *not* make them important in your life, if they have no impact on how you live your life, if they have no impact on how you spend your money, if they have no impact on how you spend your time...you’re insulting God Himself. You’re dishonoring God Himself.

So what does it mean to do justice? Would you like a little list? It’s right here in verses 7, 8, and 9. Can I look at it? Let me paraphrase. Doing justice means engaging in activities like feeding the hungry. It means releasing unjustly imprisoned and enslaved people. It means working with the sick and the blind. It means loving and helping the literally burdened. That’s actually counseling and emotional support.

It means literally guarding the immigrant. Do you see where it says, (v.9) “*The LORD watches over the alien...*”? Literally it means to guard. I think if Jesus were to visit our border detention centers he would be shocked at how we reversed this command. It means to keep the immigrant, the refugee, from being exploited or hurt, to watch over. Then it also means relieving and strengthening the single-parent family, the widow and the orphan. *That’s* doing justice. And that’s the first point.

Now let me just ask you a question before moving on to the second point. Doesn't that all sound pretty liberal, all that talk about justice? We have to care about the poor, and we need to share what we have with the poor. Doesn't that sound like a kind of liberal platform? But if we get to the places in the Bible that talk about gender, family, and sex, then it sounds incredibly conservative.

And what is the point? I guess I'd like you to see that when you come to the Bible, you need to shake your mind free from human political categories of liberal, conservative...The Bible does not fit in them, and you should not be trying to read the Bible through those kinds of political partisan glasses. You need to be open to what *God* says you should be living like. And what God says you should be living like is really fairly different than what anybody else tells you. Whatever your politics. So first of all, we see the life of justice.

The second thing we learn here is we have to live a life of justice because **God is a God of justice**. See, when people say caring for the poor is good ethics, Christians agree, but we go beyond that and say caring for the poor, for us, is not just good ethics. It's good *theology*. Because we care about the poor, we pour ourselves out for the poor, not just because we're told to do so and therefore, that's how good people live. We want to reflect the character of God, and *God* does this.

What you have here in the middle of Psalm 146 – and I want to take a few minutes to really drive this home - I want you to see the significance of the fact that God *introduces* Himself as the God of all power, omnipotence. This isn't the only place God does this. He likes to introduce Himself as the God of incredible power who loves to use that power *especially* on behalf of the weak and the powerless.

So see, the psalmist starts off by saying who God is, (v.6) “...*the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them ...*” See, that's all power, but *then* he turns around and says, (v.7) “*He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free...*” It depicts this God of enormous power who especially loves to use his power on behalf of the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. This isn't the only place he does that.

In **Deuteronomy 10:17**, “*For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome...*” Do you see? It's the same thing. Then it says, (v.18-19) “*He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*”

Over and over and over in the Bible, God introduces Himself and says, “Who am I? I am the Father for the fatherless. I am the defender of widows. I am a caretaker of immigrants.” Now do you know how important that is? If you have a business card, what do you put on it? You put on it kind of the essence of what you do. If I’m speaking somewhere, almost always I’ll be asked, “How should I introduce you? What do you want to be introduced as?”

Well, I’ll tell you the main thing I do in life. I do a lot of things, but the main thing I do out in the world is I’m the pastor of Southwest Family Fellowship in Austin, Texas. So whenever somebody says, “How should I introduce you?” The answer is, “Make it short, just say that, because that gets right to the heart of what I do and in many ways who I am.”

When God *continually* says, “I am a God who cares for the poor. I’m a God who defends the defenseless. I’m a God who cares for the alien, who loves the widows and the orphans,” - when God *introduces* Himself like that, what He’s saying is, “This is at the very heart of what I *do* in the world.”

Now do you know how different that is than the other gods of ancient times? The other gods of ancient times always exercised their power especially on behalf of the kings, the people at the top, the elites.

That’s the reason why when Naaman the Syrian heard the God of Israel could heal his leprosy - this is in a great story in 2 Kings 5; when I was in 5th grade I played the starring role of Naaman in our church musical, there’s a VHS tape out there somewhere! – but Naaman comes down and he goes to the king of Israel. He brought boatloads of money and he comes to the king of Israel and he says, “I’ve heard your God can heal lepers, and I’m a leper, so here’s your money. Give me the divine healing.” And the king of Israel tears his clothes and says, “I’m sorry. Our God doesn’t operate the way every other god does. He’s not for sale. You don’t do that. You don’t come to the pay Him off to get your healing.”

Or, for example, in the book of Numbers - It’s another very interesting story in Numbers 22 where the Israelites are coming into the Promised Land. And one of the kings who lives there, the king of Moab - his name is Balak - hires a prophet of God - his name was Balaam, don’t get them twisted – Balak hires Balaam to curse the Israelites. So he puts Balaam up on a mountain and he says, “Now curse them, because I’m going to pay you to curse them.” And Balaam says, “I can only say whatever God gives me to say.” “Well, I’m the king who’s paying you, so curse them!”

So Balaam goes to God and he turns around and *blesses* the Israelites. And Balak says, “Wait.” And he takes him to another mountain and he says, “Maybe God will let you curse them from this mountain,” so he puts him in another place and he says, “I’m going to pay you! I’m going to pay you big time!” And of course, Balaam keeps blessing them.

And the reason Balak keeps doing that is because all the other gods work this way. The gods of the nations work through the people at the top! The gods of the other nations work on *behalf* of the people at the top. It was the kings who were the mediators. It was the kings who were the ones who were put into place by the gods and so forth. But *not* the God of Israel. YHWH doesn’t work for the people at the top. He says, “I have all power, but I love to exercise it on behalf of the people at the *bottom*.” Unlike every politician who ever lived, God can’t be bought. That’s the end of point two.

Now what does that mean for us? Please don’t misunderstand me when I say this. So I’ll say it slowly and carefully. God does many other things in the world besides care for the poor, and yet it’s so close to the heart of who He is - grace to the powerless, loving those who are weak, loving those who know they aren’t strong - that God’s care for the poor is almost like his calling card. He says, “I want to be *known* as this.”

And even though we as Christians have many things to do in the world – yes, we’re supposed to be telling people about Jesus; we’re supposed to be opening our mouths and spreading the good news of the gospel - and yet, our church and Christian churches ought to be *famous* for their care for the poor. It ought to be on *our* calling card, as it were.

It ought to be something people *know* us for, because when they see us sharing the faith, when they see us doing evangelism, the world only sees us recruiting people, but when they see us pouring ourselves out for the poor, they get a little glimpse of the glory of God. They have all these filters on so they can’t see truly or rightly, but it’s almost like caring for the poor shows them the character of God in a way that blasts through their filters. It’s very important. Are we famous for this? I don’t think we are yet. I hope we can be. So, we must *do* justice, we must live a life of justice, because God is a God of justice.

Thirdly, how...How to live a life of justice before God. How can we become people who reflect the God of justice through a life of justice? Now there’s a basic answer, and I’m going to show you that it’s not enough, because there’s a problem that goes with it. But the basic answer of this text is you become a person of justice not just by discussing the God of justice, not just by talking about the God of justice, but by *praising* the God of justice - by worshiping and adoring the God of justice.

Look at **Psalm 146:1**. Is this *discussing* the God of justice? No, it's praising him! "*Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.*" The psalm is about praising God, and then it shows us He's a God of justice. And the fact is when you tell yourself to do something because you ought to do it, that's fine. When you say, "God is a God of justice. I need to do more justice in the world," fine. Do it just because God says so.

That's fine, but if you want to *habitually* be a person who does justice, if you want to be a person who is motivated to do it, something has to happen deep in your heart. It's not enough just for you to kind of beat it into your head and tell yourself to do it. Something has to happen inside...and do you know what it has to be? It has to be worship.

Because ultimately, what changes the affections of your heart in general, what changes the way in which you feel and the way in which you behave...The thing that captures your **imagination** the most is what actually **motivates** and **drives** you; the thing that you **praise** the most. The music you love the most, you tell other people to listen to. Or the books you love the most, you tell other people to read. Those are books or music or whatever that has captured your imagination! What are you doing when you say, "Oh, read this! It's incredible"? What you're doing is you're *praising* it, and it has captured your heart and it has captured your

imagination. And as a result, it's *shaping* who you are from the inside out. That's what has to happen here.

It's not enough just to believe in a God of justice. You have to be excited. You have to praise Him. You have to *adore* Him for being a God of justice. You have to work on yourself a little bit. Notice it says, "*Praise the LORD, O my soul.*" Who is he talking to there? He's talking to himself. One commentator says what the psalmist is doing here is "rousing himself to shake off apathy or gloom using his mind and memory to kindle his emotions." That's what you have to do.

See, praise and worship aren't things you have to be totally passive over. You get to your heart. You speak to your heart. You use mind and memory to kindle your emotion. You say, "Look at this God of justice!" You have to be so excited. You have to be so moved by the God of justice it turns you into a person of justice. But we have a problem here. What is the problem? Do you know? See, it's one thing to get excited about a God of grace. Boy, who wouldn't be excited by a God of grace? It's one thing to get excited and to worship a God of love or of mercy. Wow! Who wouldn't be excited by that? A God of mercy - He just loves us and He forgives us!

But a God of justice...? Who demands that you love your neighbor as yourself or you're punished? That's what a God of justice is. Wait a minute. That's kind of scary. If you go to the Sermon on the Mount and you watch *Jesus* explain what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, and that's the kind of life God wants from you, it scares you.

Do you know that place in the Sermon on the Mount where he says, "You have heard it said, 'Thou shalt not kill'"? By the way, that's the ultimate form of injustice. That's the ultimate failure to love your neighbor as yourself, to kill your neighbor. Okay. So Jesus says, "You've heard it said, 'Thou shalt not kill.'" Right. Then he says, "But I say unto you..." Uh-oh. He says, "But if you're *angry* at your brother..."

Then he goes even further and he says, "... *or if you say to your brother, 'Raca'...*" The word *raca* most likely means, "you nobody." It's a way of saying, "Don't kill your neighbor, but don't be angry at your neighbor, in fact, more than that...don't take lightly, don't disdain, don't treat as insignificant, don't ignore your neighbor." Or, he says, "Anyone who does that is in danger of the fires of hell."

All those things are contributing to the injustice in the world. It's not just unjust to harm the weak and the vulnerable, but to ignore them! And you *do* ignore them, and I ignore them. We're *not* loving our neighbor as ourselves, so how in the world can we worship? How can we adore a God of justice when we know that means *we* should be condemned? How can you worship a God of justice when you know his justice means *you* should be punished?

It's pretty ironic that right in the middle of this passage, **v.6**, it says, "*the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them,*" – and then it says - "...*the LORD, who remains faithful forever.*" That's a word that means "stands by you". He's faithful. He stands by you. It reminds us of **2 Timothy 4:16-17**, where Paul was talking about the fact that he was in prison and he was on trial for his life. And at one point he says, "*At my first defense...*" – his first trial – "*no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me...*" - Think how scary that must be, to be all alone - "*...But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength...*"

And Psalm 146 says the Lord stands by you. But how can He stand by us? He brings the wicked to ruin. There are two parts to justice, punishing the perpetrators and lifting up the oppressed, but the fact of the matter is until you begin to read the Bible and really get things straight, everybody tends to say, "Oh, I'm a victim", until you see what God demands, until you read the Sermon on the Mount.

And then you see, “I am *not* loving my neighbor as myself. I am *not* doing justice. I’m *contributing* to the misery of this world; and therefore, I deserve to be judged. So how can I worship a God of justice when I know that justice means I should be condemned?” Here’s how. When Jesus Christ preached his first sermon, in Luke 4, he chose Isaiah 61. Now as a preacher, I can tell you, your first sermon is significant. I still remember the first sermon I ever preached. The text is still my life’s blood; John 15.

Jesus chose Isaiah 61. And Isaiah 61 is talking about the Messiah who is going to come. And this is what he is going to say. This is an oracle in Isaiah 61 in which the Messiah is speaking, according to the prophecy of Isaiah. The Messiah says, in **Isaiah 61:1-2**, “*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God,*”

Now, first off, does that sound familiar? So many of these passages that talk about the God of justice make the same list. It’s very similar to Psalm 146 and many other places. “... *to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ...*”

But at the end of this in Isaiah 61, the Messiah says he is here “...*to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God...*” There are the two sides of justice: vengeance against the perpetrators and favor for the oppressed. And Jesus identifies with the God of the Old Testament and he identifies with that messianic oracle. And he says, “*I’m the Messiah, and I have come.*”

He reads the Isaiah scroll. He reads Isaiah 61 and says, “That’s what I’m about.” But guess what? When he gets to the place where it says, “...the year of the LORD’s favor...” he *stops*. He doesn’t read the last part of the verse, which is, “...*and the day of vengeance of our God...*” See, Jesus says, “I’ve come to do justice. I’ve come to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, to lift up the oppressed, the brokenhearted, and the captives,” but then he stops and he *doesn’t* say, “I’m here to bring the vengeance of our God.” Why did Jesus do that? Why did he put a period where the Old Testament had a comma?

When you read Isaiah 61, it’s *very* striking. Jesus stopped mid-verse. He read through all the justice part, and he only brought out the good news for the oppressed, and he did not get to the bad news. See, doing justice is, “I’m going to lift up the oppressed and I’m going to punish the wicked.” Jesus says, “I’ve come to lift up the oppressed,” and stopped. Why did he do that? Was he just trying to not be offensive? You know, some ministers don’t like to talk about hell, judgment, and things like that.

Was he just trying not to be offensive? Of course not. Jesus knew how to be offensive. Oh, believe me! Then why did he stop? I'll tell you why he stopped. Jesus didn't come to bring the vengeance of God. Jesus came to bear the vengeance of God. He did not come to bring judgment. He came to bear judgment. The reason he could say, "I have come to lift up the oppressed," and *not* say, "I have come to punish the wicked," was because he came to take the punishment that we, the wicked, deserve.

Oh, he didn't just stand *with* us. He didn't just stand *by* us. When he went to the cross, Jesus Christ stood *in for* us. He took the punishment we deserved. The judgment came down on *him*, and because the judgment came down on him we can be accepted...we can be loved...and he can stand by us forever, even when we fail, because our sins are forgiven. Now what does that do?

Here's what it does. There's a fascinating place in **James 2:14-17**, that says, "*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*"

James is saying, "Yes, we're saved by faith. We're saved by faith in what God has done, what Jesus has done. We're saved by faith, but if you *have* been saved by faith, if you've been *touched* by the grace of God, you *will* care about the poor. If you've experienced grace, you will do justice. You'll look at the poor and you'll say, 'That was where I was, and yet God lifted me up!'"

But here's what's going to be really unusual. Listen very carefully. This is my last point about how Christians, in some ways, are unique in the world. There are some people who don't care about justice at all. They're living for themselves. They say, "Yes, I know there are all kinds of suffering people out there. I can't be bothered. I can't do anything about it. Life is like that. There we go. I'm just going to live for myself." There are a lot of people who just don't care about justice, but then there are a whole lot of people who do.

And I want you to be people who care about justice...but be careful. There's a trap. There is a tendency for the people who really get big on justice to be very condemning, really self-righteous, and incredibly harsh because they feel like, "I'm on the side of justice. And what's wrong with all you apathetic people out there who don't care about these important issues?"

Have you ever noticed that? Have you *been* on social media? You ever read someone's post and you're like, "Man, I'm on your side, but you need to ease up. That's not helping." The people who care so much about justice very often are incredibly harsh and incredibly self-righteous.

So there are people who don't care about justice, there are people who do care about justice...and then there are Christians. Because Christians look at the cross, and that tells you two things. One is the cross tells you justice is so absolutely important that God could not set it aside. His Son had to die on the cross to satisfy the demands of justice. That means Christians know justice cannot be set aside. It's unbreakable. God's justice is *so* important that Jesus had to die for us.

But at the same time, we know, when we look at the cross, you and I were the perpetrators of injustice. The greatest injustice is we have not treated God as we should. That's the ultimate injustice. God gives us everything and we live as if we belong to ourselves. It's a form of cosmic treason. God gave us *everything*, and we lived as if we belonged to ourselves, and God *forgave* us for that.

The cross not only tells us justice is important, but the cross also tells us you have been forgiven. And because you've been forgiven, and because you know you were a perpetrator of injustice and God forgave you, that sends you out into the world with a unique balance. On the one hand, justice is important. On the other hand, you'll be gracious. You'll be humble. You'll be kind. You won't get haughty against the people who are indifferent or who are even perpetrators of injustice. Oh, you'll be insistent! You'll push! You'll speak the truth...how can you not? But you'll speak the truth in love.

Do you see how different that is? The cross makes you care about justice, but it sends you out with a kind of merciful, gracious, humble attitude if you learn how to praise and worship the God of justice now in light of the cross of Jesus Christ. See, there's the secret. How are you going to praise the God of justice? How are you going to adore the God of justice? By looking at the cross.

Oh, Lord, thank you that you're so just, that you couldn't set it aside. Thank you that you're so just that you have created a people to go out and do justice. Thank you that you're so just that in the end, you're going to make everything right. But thank you that you're such a God of justice *and* a God of love that you were willing to come and take our punishment yourself.

Jesus Christ didn't come to *bring* God's vengeance; he came to *bear* it, and if you let *that* get to the heart of your heart, it will turn you into a gracious agent of justice in the world. Do justice...love kindness...and walk humbly with your God.

Let's pray...