

ENTER THE KING: PURSUE JUSTICE

Memory verse:

“Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.” —Micah 6:8

Hey everybody!

I hope you had a great week and I pray your time together with last week’s material as a guide was fruitful! I’m praying for you all as you continue to pursue family discipleship.

This week, we’re continuing our series called “Enter the King.” Last week, we concluded our talks about what makes Jesus such a great King (and the only true King). Although we will certainly talk more about that this week and in future weeks, I want us to take a look at the biblical foundation for justice. With the recent events in our country, I want us to commit to being a people of justice because God is a god of justice. Before we do that, take a moment to pray, review the memory verse, and commit yourselves to memorizing it this week. Once you’ve done that, let’s get started.

INTRODUCTION

Let’s do a little recap. In previous weeks, we’ve talked about how the kingdom is not *of* this world. In John 18, Jesus told Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world...If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I wouldn’t be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here” (v. 36). We also talked about how the kingdom is not *like* this world. In Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples what life in the kingdom looks like and it astounded them because it was opposite to the way of the world. I remind you of those things because this week, injustice has once again become the headline of our nation as a result of George Floyd’s murder and the protests and riots that followed. My heart aches for George Floyd’s family and the African American community at-large. My heart aches for our world because I know it is broken. However, I also have hope because I know this is not the way things will always be. One day, King Jesus is returning to bring his kingdom in full and renew all things. This is the hope of everyone who follows Jesus! Although we await that day, we cannot wait without taking action. Our hearts need to be transformed and we need to be a people of justice. Where in the world does that desire to be transformed and act justly come from? It comes from God, because God cares about justice. That is why God’s people should care about justice too. Let’s open God’s Word, ask him for wisdom to deal with the injustices in our world, and ask him to make us a people of justice.

THE JUST KING

When I think of the injustices of the world, unfortunately, many come to mind: sex trafficking, slavery, poverty, racism, educational inequality, sexism, domestic abuse, abortion, police brutality, mass incarceration, and the list goes on and on. When it comes to justice for these

things, nobody can be an expert on every issue. However, the Bible provides us with wisdom to face any issue with character and resolve that are necessary. In other words, the kingdom of God gives us the framework for pursuing justice in a world of injustice. We all want a God who cares when the weak are oppressed and is willing to do something about it. Praise God, that's exactly what we find when we open the Scriptures. The Lord is a King whose righteous character compels him to defend that which he loves, and God loves justice. Psalm 146:5-10 says this:

“Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever, executing justice for the exploited and giving food to the hungry. The Lord frees prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord raises up those who are oppressed. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord protects resident aliens and helps the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the way of the wicked. The Lord reigns forever; Zion, your God reigns for all generations. Hallelujah!”

What that passage of Scripture tells us is that God's very heart beats to care for the oppressed. What that means for us is that God has been passionate about justice since long before you or I felt a need to get involved. Justice is God's agenda, and we get to be a part of the work that he's doing in restoring the beautiful order of his creation. God's reign, his kingdom, is good news for the marginalized. In the Old Testament, God is the “father of the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5), the husband to the widow (Isaiah 54:5), the provider for the poor (Psalm 104:12), and the refuge for the immigrant (Psalm 146:9). In the New Testament, God's concern for the downtrodden was revealed even more in the coming of Christ. In fact, Jesus was born fatherless (Matthew 1:18-25) into a poor family (Luke 2:24; 2 Corinthians 8:9), he immediately became an immigrant (Matthew 2:13), and eventually was most likely the son of a widow (Mark 3:31-35). In the Old Testament, God identified with the marginalized; in the New Testament, he became one of them.

THE JUST KINGDOM

Remember, the kingdom of God is God's reign *through God's people* over God's place. God usually brings about justice through his justified people. Scripture tells us the Lord is the one who watches over the sojourners, but he also commands his people to care for the sojourners (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). The Lord upholds the widow and fatherless, and he does so through a people who care for the widow and fatherless (James 1:27). God is the advocate for the poor, and he calls his people to speak up on their behalf (Proverbs 31:9). God reigns through his people. Remember our memory verse: “Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Justice is not merely a suggestion or a good idea; it is a requirement from God. And this is God's word for all of God's people.

The kingdom call to justice was a clear part of Christ's ministry. Jesus proclaimed “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23) and then immediately taught his disciples the ethics of the kingdom (Matthew 5-7). In the kingdom of God, people love their enemies rather than hate them, always keep their word, and are generous to the poor. In the kingdom, God's mercy and justice are shown through a people who reflect the heart of their King.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

While we in the West think of justice predominantly in legal terms, the Hebrew understanding of justice was a vision of beautiful order for all of life. For the Jewish people, justice was not merely legal, it was personal, relational, social, global, and even cosmic. The biblical understanding of justice can be understood through two key concepts: equity and order. The Hebrew word for justice—*mishpat*—refers to treating people equitably, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or ability to contribute to society. *Mishpat* is giving someone what they deserve, whether punishment or protection. God cares about justice because it is the beautiful order meant for the world that he created out of love. Equity could be defined as all people getting what they deserve. Order could be defined as a vision of the rightful harmony and flourishing of the world. For example, murder is a violation of equity. Order calls for acknowledging the dignity of all human life. Stealing is a violation of equity. Order calls for generosity to those in need. Slavery is a violation of equity. Order calls for pursuing and protecting freedom for all. Understanding justice in this way begins to paint a picture of what it might look like to pursue justice. However, a historical figure might help us to better understand. In his 1964 book, *Why We Can't Wait*, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. issued a pledge that he required every person who marched with him to sign. Here is that pledge:

1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham (or anywhere) seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free.
6. Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.

Dr. King knew that Jesus is the only perfect embodiment of acting justly, loving faithfulness, and walking humbly with God. So he taught his followers to look to Christ as the model and means of pursuing justice today. We, as followers of Jesus, should do the same.

PURSUING JUSTICE

Feeling overwhelmed when talking about injustice is normal. While you may not be able to do everything, you can do something. Here are four basic action steps for being a part of the solution.

Listen. To be a people of justice, we must learn to listen, especially to the victims of injustice. People feel known and heard by God when they are known and heard by his people.

Learn. There are two words that I want you to remember with this: sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is feeling compassion for someone who is hurting. Empathy is caring enough to enter

into their pain. Although both are required, we must be empathic with victims of injustice. That's why we have to be informed if we want to be involved in the work of justice. Read books. Watch documentaries. Ask questions. Never stop learning. To truly seek justice, we must commit to learning the complexity of issues and understanding the problem before we try to provide a solution.

Speak. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "Speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. Speak up, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy." We are called to be a voice for the voiceless, an advocate for the powerless, and to use our influence or platform to expose injustice and point people to grace and truth. On many social issues, before we bring our apologetics (defending the faith), we may need to bring our apologies (where we haven't been consistent with our own faith).

Act. Proverbs 21:3 says, "Doing what is righteous and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." Pursuing justice in our personal lives can look a lot like this: build relationships with people who don't look like you, raise awareness for overlooked-but-important issues, defend the weak, pray for the oppressed, create conversations, and live in a way that shows you are following the King who came to bring justice.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. You heard this tonight: "In the Old Testament, God identified with the marginalized; in the New Testament, God became one of them." How does that statement affect you? Have you ever realized that before? Who in your life needs to be reminded that Jesus was marginalized?
2. Justice is a requirement for all of God's people. What social justice issues are you most passionate about? How can you get involved and spread awareness about those issues right now?
3. Remember that the first action steps are listen and learn. Who in your life can you be more intentional about listening to and learning from? Spend some time praying for those people and then commit to meeting up with them soon.

As you close, spend time praying for one another and writing down the questions that were brought up during your discussion. Once you've done that, please send those questions to me. I want to help answer them throughout this series. I pray this has been helpful and your time together has been fruitful!

Heart & Soul,

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