

Justice is not Blind

9/30/2012

Intro: Good morning church! My name is Bryan Smith, and I am the youth pastor here at CCC.

So, what do you all think about those replacement refs in the NFL?

Clip of blown call.

I unfortunately missed the last half of the Packers and Seahawks game, and most importantly the last seconds.

I was able to see countless replays on ESPN though. And I easily concluded that the Packers player had possession, and therefore it was an interception, and not a touchdown.

But, what I want to point out is the many outcries... of injustice.

The Packers players and fans tweeting, and just your average football fans commenting on Facebook about this abysmal call.

Our sense of justice is innate. Everyone is fed up with these guys who, God bless them, are trying their best.

Thankfully, the NFL figured it out, and brought the pro refs back this week. So, we can all go back to watching football without holding our breaths when a yellow flag is thrown.

Well, it is my privilege to bring God's Word to you this morning. My hope is that you will hear the truth of God clearly, and that you will apply it to your lives today.

I have a four questions for you. Just respond non-verbally.

- 1) Will you dig into the Bible with me as we uncover what God has in store for us?
- 2) Will you be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?
- 3) Will you allow God to positively and permanently impact you this morning?
- 4) Will you stop thinking about football, and your fantasy team for the next half hour?

I know I just played that clip...

But, I hope you will. God can do so much with an open heart that seeks Him in His Word.

As opposed to a person with a critical spirit, that comes to church seeking entertainment.

Like, "this better be worth my time, I could be watching the 10 o'clock games".

Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Let's Pray

I want to invite Kevin Wolfgram up...

The message this morning is on the topic of justice:

Pledge of Allegiance... "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Now righteousness and Justice are synonymous.

So, Matthew 6:33 can easily be translated, "But seek first his kingdom and his justice..."

And so that is what we are doing this morning, seeking His justice.

Justice is moral rightness.

American society says that justice is blind (picture).

Though Lady Justice, aka Justitia rarely had a blindfold until the 1600's, and many statues depicting her still do not have a blindfold (pictures).

In medieval times, blindfolds were not representative of impartiality, but actually deception.

Justitia is the Roman goddess of Justice (Themis in Greek mythology) and she personifies the moral force in judicial systems.

The scales of truth in her hand date back to the Egyptian goddess', Maat (Muat), and later Isis. These were goddesses of balance and order. Isis was known particularly for her wisdom.

Lady Justice also holds a double edged sword, symbolizing the power of reason and justice.

And yes, Greek and Roman mythology still impact our daily lives whether we realize it or not.

Society says that fair judgments are objective, and unbiased, and therefore blind.

And there is a lot of truth to that statement.

Justice should not show favoritism, but rather impartiality.

But, whenever humans are involved there is tremendous danger of bias and subjectivity infecting the situation.

As in, they will every time.

There are a lot of ridiculous laws on the books across the United States, but I thought I would share the ones from California specifically.

California law:

- 1) You may only throw a Frisbee at the beach in Los Angeles County, CA with the lifeguard's permission.
- 2) Animals are banned from mating publicly within 1,500 feet of a tavern, school, or place of worship.
- 3) It is a misdemeanor to shoot at any kind of game from a moving vehicle, unless the target is a whale.
- 4) Women may not drive in a house coat.
- 5) No vehicle without a driver may exceed 60 miles per hour.
- 6) In Arcadia, Peacocks have the right of way to cross any street, including driveways.
- 7) In Blythe, You are not permitted to wear cowboy boots unless you already own at least two cows.
- 8) In Burlingame, It is illegal to spit, except on baseball diamonds.
- 9) In Carmel, A man can't go outside while wearing a jacket and pants that do not match.
- 10) And women may not wear high heels while in the city limits.
- 11) And in Cerritos, All dog "waste" must be removed from any yard within seven days.

<http://www.dumblaws.com/laws/united-states/california>

I would be in trouble with the law on that last one.

Apart from God's Word and therefore Judeo-Christian ethics, the societal law would be a joke.

I thank God that we do not live in strict accordance with the Code of Hammurabi anymore.

Hammurabi's law stated, "An eye for eye and a tooth for a tooth"... or what is known as mirror punishment.

This is retaliation authorized by the law. Good thing we don't teach our kids this, right?

But, at the same time, they know it instinctively... as "fair".

This is the principle of exact reciprocity.

If a person caused the death of another person (including what we deem man-slaughter self-defense, etc.), the killer would be put to death (Hammurabi's code 230).

But, I have a little twist for you.

The Biblical proof of this legal procedure is found in Exodus (and in a few other Scriptures such as Deuteronomy).

Exodus 21:22-25, ²² "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. ²³ But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."

John Calvin gets into a whole explanation of the Fetus, and how it is a real life... Which it is...

But, the deepest meaning I could derive from this Scripture, was...

Don't hit my pregnant wife. (Honey, please take a bow... my wife is pregant).

But, in all seriousness, let us always read the Bible in context and with proper hermeneutics (interpretation).

Earlier in the 21st chapter...

Exodus 21:12-14, "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. ¹³ However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. ¹⁴ But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death."

You see, the Bible goes well beyond the code of Hammurabi.

This passage establishes what first degree murder looks like, as opposed to man-slaughter or self-defense.

All of chapter 21 is an interesting read for the legal components, as are the 10 commandments in chapter 20.

The common idea that is still used today is that the punishment should fit the crime.

I think we all agree with that justice.

But, just so we are clear, the code of Hammurabi was actually supposed to ensure that people got what was coming to them, and no more.

It was not meant to be inhumane, but to set limits on retribution.

People, as you may know, have a tendency to get carried away when they are seeking revenge.

And typically this code fleshed out in monetary ways, rather than a literal eye being poked out in retribution.

The code of Hammurabi still plays a role in modern law.

And even if we do not understand all laws... The law is a valuable tool, for society to make morally right decisions.

But, where does it come from, what are its roots?

1) The Bible, the Bible is the ultimate legal text. It speaks volumes on morals and ethics in a variety of situations.

I mean, it even has a book called Judges. ;)

The primary reason that the Bible is the authoritative bottom line on justice is that it is the inspired Word of our perfectly just God.

Isaiah 30:18, "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"

And later on in Isaiah 61:8, "For I, the Lord, love justice..."

In ancient times, the final decision and responsibility of justice depended on the king.

Who is the King of kings and Lord of Lords? God.

2) Now, Justice is not blind, because God is not blind.

He knows everything, He is omniscient, all-seeing.

Thomas Jefferson said, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever."

Now Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount addressed the topic of justice.

Matthew 5:38-42, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

"You have heard it said.... But, (correction, amendment to that code), I tell you... turn the other cheek, and go the extra mile."

These sayings have become cliché, but they are brilliant teachings.

It is empowering, to respond in this righteous manner when someone uses the "law of the land" to wrong you.

Thankfully, Jesus teaches how the Christian should respond.

3) Jesus is the expert in the law.

Micah 6:8 give us a clue as well, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Walk humbly, mercifully, and with justice.

When we look at this law of equivalency or equal reciprocity in light of the Bible we do not find revenge or exact reciprocity to be Jesus' teaching.

In fact, Romans 12:9, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

The Bible teaches that retribution will come at the hands of God. It is not our job to be judge, jury or executioner.

It is not our job to seek out our own retribution.

But, the Bible does call for us to speak up for the disenfranchised, the poor, and to take care of the needy.

Galatians 2:10, "They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do."

"They" refers to Peter, James and John, Jesus' triad who recognized the validity of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

And they expressed the necessity of looking after poor people, which Paul was more than happy to do.

So, now we get into social justice. What is social justice?

Well, basically, it is upholding the equality and dignity of every human.

Social justice is often perceived as a secular concept. And many of those tenets have been adopted by liberals.

However, you may have heard once or twice that we all have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (according to the Declaration of Independence).

And you might recall that those are unalienable (absolute) rights "are endowed by their Creator".

Now, let me show you the biblical view of social justice.

The Minor Prophets, Micah and Amos repeatedly spoke out against Israel's failure to practice social justice.

As did Isaiah in Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

This is good stuff. It sounds very legal (defending and pleading the case).

But, being a Christian is a 24/7 thing, not just for the court room. And no I am not calling for you to get your capes out.

4) Social justice is far more than just Philanthropy according to the Bible.

Now, Philanthropy is a beautiful thing, but it is not always Christ-like.

Christianity calls for a hands on approach, like the Good Samaritan.

What does Jesus and His life have to say about social justice?

We see a proper picture of Jesus, our good Shepherd in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 34:16, "I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice."

Jesus' earthly ministry was all about proclaiming the Kingdom of God while healing the sick, providing food for the needy, and performing a variety of other miracles as He established His divinity.

Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is a passage often cited by social justice gurus... especially those who preach the social gospel, which I will explain in a moment.

They hear, "Jesus only focused on the poor, prisoners, and blind people in his ministry".

But, Jesus was talking specifically about salvation.

Yes, he literally healed blind people...

But, the key to his reading of Isaiah 61:1-2 is when he says in verse 21:

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus was talking about spiritual realities.

He was saying, "The Kingdom of God is right in front of you!"

- 1) The spiritually poor receive the limitless treasure of the gospel
- 2) Those imprisoned by sin, can be free.
- 3) Those who are spiritually blind will see the light.
- 4) The oppression of the disenfranchised is overcome.

Jesus does these amazing things.

The social gospel teaches that we must live in a communal home among the poor, and live just like Mother Teresa to be a true Christian.

It has the danger of being a works-based religion, and therefore not based on faith and grace.

The Ogden curriculum, which I highly recommend, focuses on the biblical merits of social justice.

The Core Truth: When love intersects broken lives, Christ's disciples are called to stand for justice. Biblical justice means lifting the bonds of oppression, identifying with the cause of the poor and meeting the needs of the downtrodden.

As Christians we are to show God's love in a broken world, upholding justice for those in need.

Proverbs 31:8-9, ⁸ Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.⁹ Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Christians, if we are living out the great commandment, and commission then the natural outflow will be taking care of the less fortunate....

Even if you consider yourself the less fortunate...

We all have people in need in our lives.

People who need a hug or a smile, or words of encouragement.

People who need money, or to borrow something from us.

We all have people who need our prayers.

People who need a friend to stand by them...

5) Be that friend, give that hug or smile, speak those words of encouragement.

Give out of your abundance, and even out of your meagerness.

Live like Christ, as a servant to all... If the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the universe can be a servant, then you can too.

Yes, we all have excuses... life is unfair, and we all struggle at times.

But, God' sovereignty is never in doubt. None of this life is out of His control.

His goodness, love, and justice are always evident, even in the midst of tragedies.

The greatest tragedy of all was Deicide; Mankind killing God, nailing him to a tree.

And yet, it was also the greatest example of love, goodness and justice.

The cross demonstrated the justice of God, because sins were atoned for...

1 Peter 2:23-25, ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live

for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Jesus on the cross entrusted himself to Him who judges justly. He bore our sin and shame to alleviate the wrath of God.

This is called propitiation.

¹⁰ “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Or, “he sent his Son as propitiation for our sins” in the ESV or NASB.

Jesus was the offering that atoned for all of the sins of mankind forever...

Romans 3:25, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement (or propitiation), through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—”

This is God’s idea of justice... SACRIFICIAL LOVE.

6) Again, God’s idea of justice is sacrificial love.

This is not philanthropy. It is not writing a check to The United Way so we can get a tax write off.

Justice is immeasurably greater than that.

If you want to embrace it, then it will require a lifestyle change...

One that the average American churchgoer will be resistant to...

Luke 11:42, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but

you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.”

I think some people in the room this morning needed to hear that Word from the Lord.

The Pharisees had this problem. Anytime our lives start aligning with these Pharisee guys... We need to say WOE!

7) God does not want us living legalistically.

Again, He wants us loving sacrificially.

Proverbs 11:25, “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

When we give of ourselves the Lord refreshes us. Give generously of your time and resources to glorify God.

Like the Beatles song, “the love you get is equal to the love you give”.

1) So, go from here, trusting the Bible for the definition of justice.

2) Knowing that God’s idea of justice is sacrificial love.

3) And stop living legalistically like the Pharisees.

I hope that when you leave here this morning you will be changed.

You will look for ways to display God’s justice to the world.

I hope that you will start using your gifts and resources for God’s glory, along with your time and energy.