



justice
at the table

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES DAY
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justice is what we do

T rue social justice is not blind, nor totally impartial. It is partial to those most affected by evil and oppression. It is symbolized in the Old Testament by four groups: widows, orphans, the poor, and strangers in the land. It is embodied in the New Testament by: Jesus' mission to those on the social and religious margins of society.

A 'Call to Justice' is found in Luke 18:1-8, known as "The Parable of the Persistent Widow". The passage reads, "1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor [a]regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, [b]'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, "Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will [c]avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

While enjoying a day of shopping during a women's retreat, the sight of a young girl sitting on the roadside dressed in

clothing that is obviously too large, dirty, and unkempt, made it impossible to fight back tears. The child's eyes were vacant of life but full of hopelessness, making the symbolism most disturbing. Here was an eight-year-old child remanded to live on the streets without the possibility of the joy of childhood; a period in her life that she was not "big" enough to navigate emotionally or physically. It does not matter which side we fall on, when it comes to the less fortunate and un-engaged opportunity, we are all diminished when we lose our concern for humanity and the human condition. Who will advocate on their behalf? The question recalls the song, "Who Will Be Jesus to them?" Indeed, it was painful and brings the group to share an unintended collective lament.

We are so impacted, we weep because of the brokenness and sin upon humanity. We also weep because of the persistence of God's love, through Jesus Christ, for us to be humanity's gracious and merciful hope. This scripture reminds us that God beckons us each day, through prayer and action, to advocate for justice on behalf of hurting members of the human race. Jesus is teaching the disciples, through this parable, the importance of prayer in action. This is what we must do. As His disciples, we too, are invited to "weary" God with our prayers for justice in our daily witness on behalf of Christ.

justice is whose we are

Biblical justice is fundamentally “making things right,” not simply recognizing or defining individual rights. It is concerned with the “right relation” of human beings to God and to each other.

To bring justice to the table, we must be diligent while also aware of the enemy’s intentions to promote discouragement and feelings of inadequacy in our efforts and to our perception of wholeness through human intervention.

We cannot allow the enemy a seat at the table prepared for us. Louie Giglio says, “Believers have a real enemy that shows up in our circumstances and relationships to destroy us. Being the deceiver, the enemy will show up in ways we least expect and tell us lies.” Giglio uses a powerful illustration to show believers that we don’t have to entertain the enemy. We don’t even have to tolerate him. Psalm 23 says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Giglio instructs Christians to take authority by the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit to tell the enemy, “You don’t get a seat at my table.”

When the Scripture speaks of enemies, this can mean powers & principalities, circumstances closing in, issues of poverty, a diagnosis that you didn’t see coming, a person who is undermining you, or it can be an internal struggle / external addiction. All are enemies!

Visual Illustration: A table set up toward the front of the auditorium. The table is small and has two chairs but placed on it is a lavish spread of fruit, vegetables, and pastries.

Not only does God set this table for us in the presence of our enemies, Jesus Himself sits down at the table with us. Psalm 23 begins, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” John 10:10-11 says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

ILLUSTRATION

CHARACTERS: Christian (Justice, also representative of Jesus); Woman; Optional third character: Enemy.

SCENE: The scene is Christian and the Woman sitting across the table with hands outstretched and clasped together across the table. Christian is speaking life and hope into the life of Woman. (This could be a testimony of God’s just intervention in a personal circumstance, a biblical illustration of the justice of God, etc.)

Psalm 23:5 says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Meaning, we sit at the table with the Good Shepherd, but the enemy is prowling around the table. He wants to sit down with us also. If we’re not careful, the devil

will take a seat at your table without your permission. (The speaker could illustrate this as the Enemy, circling the table, then bringing her own chair and interrupting the Woman's fellowship and encouragement from Christian.)

Once the enemy gets a seat at your table, he will start to speak to you. His goal is to stop the flow of "justice at the table". If you hear any of the following four phrases, or variations of them, in your internal dialogue, you could very well have given the enemy a seat at the table. (These phrases could be spoken by the Enemy or speaker to the Woman and answered by Christian with the counter-responses.)

"You're never going to make it." Since the enemy is constantly trying to get us to trip up and stop following Jesus, he will try to convince us that there's no point in continuing. However, while the devil is telling you, "you're not going to make it through the valley", the Shepherd is telling you he is with you in the valley.

"There's something better at the other table." This will invite you to compare another person's God-given table to your own. You might be tempted to get up from the table, leaving the security and fellowship of the Good Shepherd, to try to get what's at the other table.

"You're not good enough." If you really weren't good enough, the Good Shepherd would have never left His throne in heaven to sit with you at your table. He laid down His life for you to be seated with Him" (Ephesians 2:6).

"Everyone's against you." This can be anyone from your coworkers, to your family members, to your fellow church-goers. When we listen to this lie, it makes us walk through life with clenched fists. We shift into an uber-defensive posture in life, and we start thinking of things that aren't true about people. We start projecting onto people the rejection that we 'think' we're getting from others.

We cannot allow the enemy to take a seat and bring doubt and discouragement to the hope and mercy God has for us. It's true you can't control who or what prowls around the table (evil, circumstances of life, etc.) However, as you sit there, in the presence of those enemies, you have the authority to "invite to the table and send away from the table" anyone you choose. We need to recognize the authority we have, through the Holy Spirit, to tell the enemy to "take a hike!" We've got the power in the name of Jesus to say to the enemy, "You do not have a seat at my table. I belong to a just God, and justice prevails at my table!"

God prepares the table in the presence of our enemies, because God wants you to know that "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." Greater is He that is in you than the poverty, loss, or loneliness you may be facing. God proves that he is bigger than your enemies, and He will protect and provide for His own. In the middle of the battle, God will show your enemies that He is in control. Your countenance in the presence of your enemies is a powerful testimony to the greatness of the One to whom you belong. (Characters leave.)

justice is who we are

God-centered justice does not claim a strict philosophical definition, but in biblical texts it is linked with qualities such as mercy, steadfast love, and fidelity. In scripture, there is no traditional contrast between obligations in charity and obligations in justice. Micah 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

What does God require? Justice. Mercy. Humility. Of course, these things do not implicitly answer every question about every situation we face. They do not tell you simply and directly whether you should continue to invite that worrisome neighborhood kid into your family circle of relationships. They do not automatically tell the boss what to do about the employee who has a sick wife, a mortgage, and four children and has been caught with a hand in the till. Micah does not write the sermon for a pastor who must speak to both the bankrupt and the banker. But if we want to do what God requires, then in each instance we must ask, "Where does justice seem to lie here? What best expresses mercy? Where is the path of humility? How do we seem best able to express who we are?"

Often, Micah points a positive way forward. Some mothers are imprisoned, perhaps because they grew up in impoverished homes or suffered from racial prejudice and poor education. Before they were equipped emotionally or economically, they had babies. Now they are in jail but have no money to hire attorneys. So, there they sit... two, three, four, five, even six months without a hearing and without even talking to a public defender. All the while, their babies and children are outside the jail, getting passed around from one caretaker to another. Does anyone hear a cry for justice? You're watching a television interview with someone who has AIDS, and that person says, "You know, ever since I was diagnosed, it's like I don't have friends anymore. Everyone just disappeared." Do you hear a plea for hesed (charity, mercy, grace)?

In talking about what God requires, Micah is not thinking about things we do to win God's friendship or be granted inclusion in His house. However, that justice, mercy and humility are things we do because of "who we are." A peach tree does not give peaches to prove that it is a peach tree. It gives peaches because it IS a peach tree. So, who are we? We are people whom God loves without condition, without reserve,

and without fail. Earlier in Micah 6, Micah reminds the people that God did not free them from slavery because they had passed the Introduction to Freedom course. God freed them because God loved them and wanted them to be free.

To 'do justice' is to have a right relationship with the community. Dealing with a question similar to Micah's, Moses says that the test case of whether a person or a community is "just" is how we treat the orphan, the widow, the stranger, and those who are legally helpless (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). You can tell a community is "just" when it embraces those who are most helpless.

To 'love mercy' refers to closeness within the community, to empathize and identify with others, and to have intimate and heartfelt affection. The Hebrew word we translate mercy from is *hesed*. In the Bible this word sometimes describes how God relates to us: With loving kindness, feeling our suffering, and rejoicing in our rejoicing. Someone describes it as "devotion grounded in love which goes beyond legal obligation and can be depended on to the utmost."

To 'walk humbly' with God is not to abase yourself but to simply acknowledge that you are a creature and not the Creator, that you are finite and not infinite, and that you are human and not God. We recognize that we are not the source of all the wisdom we need and turn attentively to God for His wisdom and direction.

Justice flows from God's heart and character. As true and good, God seeks to make those whom He loves whole. This is what motivates God throughout the Old and New Testaments in his judgments on sin and injustice. When we think about the lavishness and steadfastness of divine love, the question is answered, "What does God want from us?" To remember who we are!

So, "justice" involves making individuals, communities, and the cosmos whole, by upholding both goodness and impartiality. It stands at the center of true religion. According to James, the kind of "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). Earlier Scripture says, "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern" (Prov. 29:7).

God will bring justice in every arena of life. As Christians, we bring the same God-kind of justice to others. That is who we are! We respond to the clarion call for advocacy, to be the hands and arms that reach out to those around us, that reach across the table, that reach into that child's vacant life and bring hope to the hopelessness, that wrap our arms around the widow, the poor, the destitute, and change their future. We prayerfully value justice!