

“Jesus Shaped Life - The Justice of Jesus”

Scripture: Matthew 12:18, 20; James 2:15-17; Matthew 6:9-10, 33; Zech. 7:9-10

Graphics: cross, boxes, justice, Lord’s Prayer

Big Truth: Followers of Jesus at the Panama UMC are called to take on a Jesus-Shaped life. During Lent, we spend time understanding what that means. A Jesus-shaped life is a holy life. A Jesus-shaped life is an obedient life. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of healthy relationships. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of courage. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of justice. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of mission. Many things shape our lives, but the life of Jesus must be the primary life-shaper.

Focus Phrase: The justice of Jesus does the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

1. Introduction

- A. We’re taking on a Jesus-Shaped Life...a life of holiness...a life of obedience... a life of healthy relationships...and a life of courage.
- B. And these aren’t things we invented or strive to model from the world’s perspective. Every part of the Jesus-Shaped Life is, well, being more like Jesus, who WAS AND IS holy and obedient...and modeled healthy relationships...and was courageous.
- C. (CROSS) The fifth aspect of a Jesus-Shaped Life is JUSTICE.
- D. When we think of justice, so many things come to mind - the criminal justice system, getting what’s fair, getting even, maybe.
- E. Dave Hagler was an umpire in a recreational league in his spare time. In an LA Times article, he shared: “I was driving too fast in the snow in Boulder, Colo., and a policeman pulled me over and gave me a speeding ticket. I tried to talk him out of it, telling him how worried I was about insurance, etc., and he said I should go to court and try to get it reduced or thrown out. The first game of the next baseball season, I’m umpiring behind home plate and the first batter up is the same policeman. I recognize him, he recognizes me. He asks me how the thing went with the ticket. I tell him, “Swing at everything!”
- F. The umpire strikes back!
- G. There’s certainly something satisfying about seeing justice done. We always want the good guys to defeat the bad guys in the end of any movie, right?
- H. But we know that in this world, the good guys don’t always win. There are times when life seems unfair and the guilty go unpunished. We cry out for justice...and yet it doesn’t always come.
- I. Today, we’ll find out why and what we’re called to be doing about that, as followers of Jesus who are taking on a Jesus-Shaped Life in THIS life.
- J. We’ll take a look at what the Bible has to say about godly justice. Then, we’ll see how the early church took on the justice of Jesus...and how WE are to be people of justice in this world.

K. Let's pray and then we'll begin with the justice of Jesus...

L. **PRAY!**

M. Here's where we're headed today: **The justice of Jesus does the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.**

2. Scripture

A. In Matthew 12, in verses 18 and 20 we read these words from the prophet Isaiah, who was pointing to Jesus hundreds of years before He was born: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles...He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory."

- i. Jesus was just. In fact, Jesus WAS justice. The world has one definition of justice, which includes aspects of fairness and equality. And while those aren't necessarily bad or wrong, God's justice is far far more.
- ii. God's justice - the justice Jesus came to embody - has everything to do with **making people, communities, and the entire universe WHOLE**, by upholding both goodness and impartiality.
- iii. The reason the Father sent Jesus to earth when He did was because the world, communities, and people were not whole...sin was unresolved, people had lost their way. Jesus came to show us a HIS life of justice...and in fact, BE justice for us. Jesus came to make it all whole again!

B. But what did that look like in the bible?

- i. Biblically, justice can be defined as **defending the vulnerable**.
- ii. Way back in the Old Testament book of Zechariah, we read these words, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another." Zechariah 7:9-10
- iii. Widows, orphans, aliens, and the poor were all vulnerable people...they had no power and no way to get the resources they needed. They were dependent on those around them...and the Lord commanded that His people show mercy and compassion towards them.
- iv. Many times in the gospels, Jesus lifted up the widows...gave status to the children...welcomed the foreigner...and included the orphan as a child of God. The justice of Jesus defends the vulnerable.

C. Another aspect of justice comes to us from the book of James (James 2:15-17): "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply

their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

- i. James would define justice as **love made visible**.
 - ii. When we love others, as Jesus commands, we would do whatever we could to help someone in their time of need.
 - iii. Jesus healed people who were lame and blind. Jesus rescued a woman caught in adultery from an angry crowd ready to stone her. Jesus miraculously fed thousands bread and fish. The justice of Jesus included meeting the physical needs of those around him.
- D. But my favorite definition of the justice of Jesus is even more broad, and it comes to us in the words of the Lord’s Prayer.
- i. The definition would be something like: **justice is a reflection of heaven on earth**.
 - ii. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9–10).
 - a. In heaven, God’s will is done perfectly. There’s no sin, and all is as God originally intended.
 - b. When we pray the words of the Lord’s Prayer, we’re bold and confidently asking the realities of heaven to show up in our zip code today.
 - i) In heaven, no one treats another unfairly because of the color of their skin. So, we pray for that to be reality in our communities, and we take action toward that end.
 - ii) In heaven, no one goes hungry, so we work toward that end on earth by feeding those who need food.
 - iii) In heaven, there’s no human trafficking or economic injustices, so we work to end those things on earth today.
 - iii. The justice of Jesus does the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.
- E. What did that look like in the early church? And what does that look like now?
- i. The first Century church was marked by five distinctive features, all of which made it stand out from the society around it:
 - a. It was multiracial and multiethnic. Gentile and Jews and all ethnicities.
 - b. It cared for the poor, asking the wealthier to share what they had with the poor in their midst.
 - c. The early church stood against infanticide and abortion.
 - d. It held that marriage and sexuality was between one man and one woman for life. And,

- e. The church was nonviolent, advocating pacifism both personally and nationally.
- ii. Today, the first two traits would be considered liberal positions, as they deal with race and class. The second two could be considered conservative positions, and the last one doesn't fall into either bucket.
- iii. The early church wasn't trying to be liberal or conservative. That's not because the early church was trying to be centrist or avoid taking controversial positions. To the contrary, those positions were unusual at the time.
- iv. The reason the early church didn't fit a category is that it based its values on **kingdom principles**, not political platforms or societal norms. And no single human ideology mirrors the values of the kingdom of God.
- F. We can learn a lot from the early church, especially in our culture that draws lines in the sand to label and condemn those who aren't on our side of the line.
- G. The justice of Jesus does the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

3. Application

- A. Your goal, as you take on more and more the shape of Jesus, is not to advance some kind of political agenda as you seek justice in this world.
- B. The Jesus-Shaped Life seeks the justice of Jesus, which is a KINGDOM justice, according to the way of Jesus.
- C. Today, we have all the same justice issues that were present in the early church - hunger, poverty, racism, political corruption. We also add things like climate change, advanced human trafficking, wage injustices, a criminal system that needs significant reform, and more. You can name more, I'm sure.
- D. You and I can't address every single injustice in the world. And we certainly can't address them adequately with political ideologies or social constructs.
- E. Only the justice of God will fully and completely address injustice in this world. And that happens when the Word of God and the Spirit of God transform the PEOPLE of God into the shape of Jesus!
- F. Because only the justice of Jesus is aimed at WHOLENESS and not just solving a social problem or meeting immediate needs.
- G. To begin to figure that out in your own life - because we all have different passions for injustice in this world - start in Matthew 6:33. Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness..."

H. Seek the Kingdom

- i. The kingdom of God is life when God is fully in charge.

- ii. Seeking God's kingdom first means that we won't form our position on an issue based on a political party's platform or an ideological camp. No political party fully represents the kingdom of God. That's not their purpose.
- iii. There's nothing on earth like the church of Jesus Christ, populated with sold-out Jesus people doing nothing but serving our Lord and Savior.
- iv. There's nothing wrong with being part of a political party, but remember that worldly politics will ultimately leave you without the answers that the kingdom of God has, especially to combat injustice.

I. Second, **Serve out of love**

- i. Ask, "How can I express love in this situation?" For example,
 - a. When dealing with the issue of race, we ask: "What is the most loving response to those of different skin color or ethnicity from me?"
 - b. Acting out of love means we don't deal with hunger as an issue, but rather acknowledge the hungry as people.
 - c. Or, name an injustice and ask, "What will the resolution of this issue look like in heaven?"
- ii. The most loving response will not always be immediately apparent in every situation, but the Holy Spirit will guide you if you seek Jesus' way and not simply to follow your favorite cable news network.
 - a. Throughout the centuries, Christians have established hospitals and orphanages to care for the vulnerable.
 - b. Christ-followers led the way to abolish the practice of slavery in the Western world.
 - c. Today, through organizations like the International Justice Mission, Christians are helping God's will be done on earth toward the poor and enslaved. And, yes, slavery is a huge injustice still in this world.
- iii. Finally, as you seek the kingdom and serve out of love to address injustice, **Serve Well**
 - a. What do I mean? I mean serve any needs, without expectation of anything in return, and serve unnoticed.
 - b. Those are challenging ways to serve for sure. You and I like to serve where we like to serve, and maybe we just want a thank you or to be noticed.
 - c. Jesus never sought a thank you. Many times, Jesus didn't even want people to say anything about what he did to heal them. Jesus was willing to serve any need - physical, spiritual, emotional, relational.

- d. He's our model because Jesus IS the justice of God for this world.
 - e. And when we seek the kingdom first, and serve well, out of love, then we always carry the justice of Jesus to the world, as it is in heaven.
- J. The justice of Jesus does the will of God on earth as it is in heaven.

4. Conclusion

- A. Justice won't be complete on earth until Jesus returns. Never forget that. We await that day with hope and expectation that all things will be made whole. Yet, we are called to imagine that reality and make it known today.
- i. Imagine with me a world with no racism...
 - ii. Imagine with me a world without slavery or human trafficking...
 - iii. Imagine with me a world with no war or fighting...
 - iv. ...a world with no hunger or poverty...
 - v. ...where children are protected and safe from ANY harm...
 - vi. ...or no climate challenges or pollution or lack of clean water...
- B. We are called, as the followers of Jesus, to serve the world in one or more of these areas. It begins here. It begins now.
- C. This week, let me challenge you to seek God's will for one injustice you see... and then take time to begin addressing it. It can be as simple as donating money, but what would it look like to do something more tangible?
- D. Begin with prayer. And then confront the injustice in the love of Jesus.
- E. Bring the justice of heaven right here on earth this week.
- F. Let's pray...