

“Where the Rubber Meets the Road:God’s Justice”

Scripture: Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 1:6-19

Graphics: tire, tire track, road, justice, scales

Big Truth: God’s mercy, sovereignty, and justice are all truths that impact our lives as followers of Jesus. Yet, we often either don’t understand these truths or live into them fully. God wants his truth to be our experience fully. That’s where the rubber meets the road and causes forward motion into a deeper life with Christ and his mission to make disciples. The people of PUMC are called to reflect God’s mercy, submit to God’s sovereignty, and enact God’s justice in the world.

Focus Phrase: God’s justice is righteousness unleashed and enacted in my life for the world.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY! (Jesus, you are Lord...)

B. There’s a song written by Bob Stromberg and others entitled Where Justice Rolls Down. Here are the lyrics of the chorus and verses...

- i. Where justice rolls down like a mighty water
And righteousness grows like an ever-flowing stream
And mercy resounds like the waves on the ocean
Let praises rise high on the songs of the redeemed
- ii. There is a river that streams from the temple
Begins as a trickle but ends in the sea
As it grows healing it will give
Where it flows ev'rything will live
- iii. Wade in the water and feel the strong current
Remember the stagnance of stale life before
God is here leave the past behind
In these clear waters you will find
- iv. Chorus...

C. Justice is one of those words and concepts that has one meaning in our culture, but a broader and more powerful view in scripture - when we relate justice to God. This song was based on Ezekiel 47 and the vision of God’s justice being like a river flowing into the world from the Temple.

D. But there are other aspects of justice...here’s an illustration of one...

E. “At one time a young soldier was brought before General Robert E. Lee because he was charged with some offense during the Civil War. The young man was so afraid that he was shaking. General Lee looked at him and said, “Don't be afraid son, you'll get justice here.” The young soldier replied, “That’s why I’m shaking, sir.”” (Laurence W. Veinott)

F. This type of justice is fearful justice...or what some call retributive justice - getting the punishment you deserve for a crime.

- G. Other types of justice are distributive (determining who gets what), procedural (determining how fairly people are treated), and restorative (which tries to restore relationships to “rightness.”) The song lyrics I began with tell us about restorative and maybe even some distributive justice.
- H. Here’s some procedural and restorative justice: “A poor, hungry man was walking down a street in a village of medieval Turkey. He had only a piece of bread in his hand. He came to a restaurant where he saw some meatballs being grilled. The cooking meat was so near and the smell so delicious. The man held his piece of bread over the meat to catch some of its wonderful smell. As he started to eat the bread, the angry restaurant owner seized him and took him away to see the judge. “This man was stealing the smell of my meat without asking permission,” said the restaurant owner. “I want you to make him pay me.” “The judge thought for a minute and then held his purse in front of the owner and shook it up and down.” “What are you doing that for?” asked the owner. The judge replied, “I am paying you. The sound of money is fair payment for the smell of food.” (Raymond C. Clark, *The Tales of Nasreddin Hodja* [Brattleboro, Vermont: Pro Lingua Associates, 1991], 33.)
- I. I love that! Think for a moment about your concept of justice. Is it just someone else getting what they deserve? Or is it more about making sure everyone has enough?
- J. Now, we’re not really here to talk about what WE think is justice and what kind. We’re here to see what GOD’S JUSTICE is and how that impacts our lives as followers of Jesus, the Son.
- K. (tire) This is *Where the Rubber Meets the Road*.**
- L. It’s the place - the moment, the circumstance - when and where things get real...get serious...something starts to happen. For us, it’s the everyday impact that God has on you and me, right here, right now.
- M. We’ve been looking at three grand characteristics of God where the rubber meets the road of our lives: **God’s MERCY, God’s SOVEREIGNTY, and (finally today) God’s JUSTICE.**
- N. Last week, I asked you to spend time bowing before the Sovereign God... praying the prayer in Psalm 139 every day - search me and know my heart... test me and know my thoughts...see if there is any wicked way in me...and lead me in the way everlasting. God is in control.
- O. Today, in the last message in this series, we’ll look at God’s **Justice**...and how we are called to enact GOD’S justice in the world today.
- P. This week, we’ll read from Psalm 146, which gives us a glimpse of this grand truth about God justice. Then, we’ll go to the last chapter of Paul’s first letter to Timothy to see where that rubber meets Paul’s road, and then, ours.

Q. If you're taking notes, write this down: **God's justice is righteousness unleashed and enacted in my life for the world.**

R. We'll start in Psalm 146, so open your bibles with me:

2. Scripture

A. READ Psalm 146

- i. Throughout this psalm, do you know what name the author uses for God? It isn't YHWH or El Shaddai, which are also widely used throughout scripture. No, the title for God is **Elohim** - which means **God our Judge**.
- ii. It's the characteristic of God as JUDGE that's at play here... who made heaven and earth, and who executes justice for the oppressed. It's Elohim who knows who is right and who is wrong and makes things right. Elohim lifts people up, opens eyes, loves the righteous, and punishes the wicked.
- iii. In this psalm, we see every form of justice we talked about earlier - restorative, retributive, procedural, and distributive. **Elohim - God our Judge - is EVERY form of justice lived out in the world.**
- iv. The truth about God is that He IS Justice. It's a spiritual given. It's expressed throughout scripture, both Old and New Testaments...
 - a. Psalm 89:14 - "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you."
 - b. Isaiah 61:8 - "For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them."
 - c. Colossians 3:25 - "For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality."
 - d. Hebrews 6:10 - "For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do."
- v. Justice is not just punishment for evil, but is lifting up the poor and the oppressed. It's not just judging, but is loving and providing.
- vi. Webster's definition of justice is: *the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments.*
- vii. That's a mouthful! Yet, what I think it means is that there's a judge (Elohim) who is in charge of saying who's right and who's wrong and what is to be done to make things right for the one who has been wronged. But maybe we can just say that **God's Justice is making all things right throughout all Creation.**

- viii. But how does that work in our lives... where does the rubber meet the road for God's justice - all things being made right - for you and me? Because, we KNOW that all things are not right, right?
- ix. Maybe Paul can help us... let's turn to 1 Timothy 6... verse 6...

B. READ 1 Timothy 6:6-19

- i. You may be thinking, "I didn't hear the word justice anywhere in this passage."
- ii. Right, that's because Paul was not teaching Timothy about what God's justice is, but how he wanted Timothy to be allowing the rubber of God's justice to meet the road in the church.
- iii. To do that, Paul began by talking about the characteristics of someone - a follower of Jesus - who is **godly**. Someone who is godly is someone in whom God's justice finds favor. There's a distinction made throughout scripture between those who pursue evil and those who pursue godliness.
- iv. Paul uses money to be the symbol or main pathway for people who are trusting (or at least tempted to trust) something other than God. Ungodly.
- v. He finished the first section in vs. 10 with, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wondered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."
- vi. He wasn't saying that money is evil... but that anything that pulls a person or tempts a person to walk away from faith is not God's desire. And whatever works against God's desire is evil.
- vii. But then Paul looks Timothy straight in the eye and says, "...shun all that; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness... fight the good fight... take hold of eternal life... keep the commandments... and if you are rich, don't be haughty about it... don't put your hope in money... but be rich in good works... to live the life that is really life."
- viii. All that to say, be righteous and, if you are, God our Judge will find you faithful, so that no judgement comes against you. That's God's justice.
- ix. It's really that simple, Timothy: be righteous, doing all that God desires, trusting in him, taking hold of the eternal life God promises in Jesus Christ, and God will judge you to be godly... and bless you, maybe with money, but most importantly with eternal life.
- x. But, if people don't seek after God's will, and instead trust in wealth or sex or fame or status or anything OTHER than God's will, then God - Elohim the Judge - will allow them to be plunged in ruin and destruction.

3. Application

- A. Church, we sometimes make the Christian life too complicated. We will all stand before God one day - on the Day of Judgement - and God will recount your life for you. All your sin and every godly deed, when you were walking away from God and when you were running to Him, will all be clear. God our Judge will stand ready to condemn because He's a holy God and we all fall short of God's glory.
- B. But, in a moment of incredible mercy and grace, those whose faith and hope are in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, who are following Him with their lives, will be forgiven of all sin and given eternal life by grace. That's the Good News of the gospel! That's God's justice.
- C. That's why Jesus said in Luke 18:7-8, "And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"
- D. God's justice on judgement day will be spectacular, and will humble you and send you to your knees in gratitude and praise.
- E. But Paul's admonition to Timothy, and the psalmist's words in psalm 146, and even the song lyrics we started with all point to one truth: **today is the day to live in righteousness for God...so that God's justice can impact your life and the world today - where the rubber meets the road.**
- F. God's justice spurs you and me onto godliness and faith...and that spurs us on to enacting God's justice in the world - making things right!
- G. God's justice is righteousness unleashed and enacted in my life for the world.
- H. So what are you and I to get busy doing? I mean, we aren't the judge...we are the judged. Yet, justice is more than just being judged. It's God wanting to interact with the world He created.
- I. In addition to all the things that Paul listed out for Timothy earlier, in order to help get the rubber on the road, we go to Micah 6:6-8, in the Message paraphrase. Let me read this and then we'll simply let it settle in. "How can I stand up before God and show proper respect to the high God? Should I bring an armload of offerings topped off with yearling calves? Would God be impressed with thousands of rams, with buckets and barrels of olive oil? Would he be moved if I sacrificed my firstborn child, my precious baby, to cancel my sin? But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously - take God seriously."
- J. Let's use Micah 6:8 as our application today...
- K. #1 - **Do what is fair and just to your neighbor...**

- i. This isn't just about the people that live next door to you. This is about everyone with whom you come in contact. Be fair. Be just.
- ii. I sat at the Bills game last Monday night and there was ONE Tennessee Titan's fan in our whole section. Some in the area were kind, or at least said nothing. A couple Bills fans were less than kind. Enacting the unleashed justice of God means welcoming even the stranger with whom we disagree.
- iii. Always treat each the other with respect and care. We have one community, one country, and one planet. We're bound by our faith in Jesus and our gratitude for God's justice in our lives to show others full fairness and justice.

L. #2 - Be compassionate and loyal in your love...

- i. Jesus said, "...love God and...love your neighbor as yourself."
- ii. Never give up on love. Love is not dependent on what the other person does. And, thankfully, it's not dependent on your attitude. Compassionate and loyal love is what Jesus wants to show others through you. It's the kind of love that God has shown in your life over and over again.
- iii. Justice is enacted in the world when the people of God show love because of Jesus and His love. And finally,

M. Don't take yourself too seriously - take God seriously.

- i. I wish this one were easier for me...I need to lighten up.
- ii. Jesus did the full work of salvation on the cross for you and me. God was serious when he laid out the plan of salvation through Jesus and his cross.
- iii. Your call and mine is to walk in humility before God, yielding your life to him as you grow into the image of Jesus. John Wesley calls that sanctification - the process of becoming more and more like Jesus.
- iv. And it doesn't take long to look at the life of Jesus to know that he humbled himself before the God of Justice...so much so that Jesus gave up everything to become human, to die on a cross, for you...that's serious.
- v. So that - and here's the thing - so that God could make all things right throughout all Creation - THAT is God's justice...

N. In our lives, the rubber meets the road when we're fair and just with others, love compassionately, and take God seriously.

O. "Where justice rolls down like a mighty water..." into your life and into the world. It's God making all things right in your life and the world.

4. Conclusion

A. As we wrap up this series, continue to allow the rubber to meet the road of your life. Grow in God's mercy, sovereignty, and justice in YOUR life.

- B. God's mercy is not getting what we deserve. God's sovereignty means He is in control and we're not. And God's justice is putting all things right in the world, and we get to be part of that.
- C. When the rubber meets the road, you and I are called to grow as disciples by allowing God's mercy, sovereignty, and justice to impact US and the world through us.
- D. It's GO time...let's pray.
- E. **PRAY!**