

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

We don't have to look very far in this world to see injustice. Every day we come face to face with it in some way – headlines scream of the abuse of power, war, poverty, disease. Social media is full of frustration at broken systems, pleas for change, and calls to action. Our world is facing a climate crisis, a pandemic, political unrest, exploitation, slavery, and racial injustice. And in our own neighbourhoods, workplaces, and schools, people are struggling to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, and so much more. Every day we are faced with injustice, and every day we have the opportunity to address it.

When you look at the world, what issues of injustice stand out to you? Sometimes it may feel overwhelming – you look at the world in all of its brokenness and mess and question how a good God could allow suffering and unrest? You may look at statistics that feel overwhelming when you stop to realize that each and every number represents a life. And you may wonder where God is in the midst of this? The answer is right smack dab in the middle of it – rescuing, redeeming, and restoring His creation, because God is a God of justice.

I have a friend who lives on the streets in Toronto. She is kind, looks out for others, has an incredible smile, and has fallen in love with Jesus through the pages of her Bible. One day we found my friend on a busy street corner. I sat down with her and asked how she was, she said that she was not doing too well. I asked her what was up and she quietly explained that she was done with people, with being overlooked. This is a woman who has experienced more hurt, pain, and abandonment in her life than most of us could wrap our heads around – a woman who has braved life on the streets for most of her life. But on this day she was done. She pointed at the people walking by on the sidewalk and said that no one would even look at her. And tears welled in her eyes as she told me someone had dropped a single dime in her cup, she looked at me and asked, "Is that all I am worth?" I assured her she was worth infinitely more. I asked if I could pray for her as the crowds of people continued to walk by us. I prayed that God would protect her, keep her safe, give her what she needed, and that she would know just how deeply loved she was – but my heart also pleaded for more, for housing, for healing for her body, for a way out of addiction. As I prayed I saw an image of Jesus, sitting close beside my friend on the sidewalk. As scores of people walked by without a glance, Jesus' eyes, full of compassion, were glued to her.

I finished praying and she quickly said that she knew that Jesus was with her, she saw Him sitting beside her on the sidewalk. I told her I had seen the same and we rejoiced together. This moment didn't solve the challenges that surrounded her. It didn't heal a lifetime of hurt. It didn't provide a way out of her situation. But it did affirm the love of a God who is not immune to suffering and injustice, a God who sees and knows His people, and a God who knows the infinite worth of my dear friend. A God who longs for better things, who longs for flourishing and justice to come into every dark corner of this world. A God who meets people right where they are and who has a plan for restoration and rescue.

Last week Pastor Jeremy ended off the Signpost of Hope series with a sermon on justice and highlighted how we, as followers of Jesus, are called to be justice bringers in this world. Today we are jumping into a new series called Justice in Jesus. This series will explore Biblical justice and how we can follow Jesus, the blueprint for justice, as He leads us to live justly both locally and globally. Today we are going to dive deeper into what Biblical justice is and how we can practically live it out in our lives.

When you hear the word justice, what comes to mind? We often tend to think of two different spheres:

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

- 1) Justice in terms of law and order: Right vs. Wrong. Perpetrator vs. Victim. The guilty being held accountable and getting what they deserve.
- 2) Justice in terms of social action: Protest, petitions, and social change. Those fighting against systems that are broken, that leave people vulnerable, and that exploit members of our community.

Both of these spheres are very real places where justice is brought forth in our world. But Biblical justice is far deeper and richer – it is more than a buzzword, but a rich story of a God who is justice. At its simplest, justice is what love looks like lived out. But in order to fully understand the deepness of what Biblical Justice is and why it is so close to God’s heart, we need to look through His word.

The Bible is full of stories, verses, and descriptions of Biblical justice. I think one of the clearest ways to understand Biblical justice is to look at the intersection between the two greatest commandments that God gives His people in Mark 12:30-31, “³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’^[a] ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”. Justice is what happens in the world when we love God and loves others.

To gain a deeper understanding of this intersection, we need to look at the context and richness of the three key Hebrew words, Shalom, Mishpat, and Tsedaqah. Flourishing, justice, and righteousness. If you have joined in on any of our justice events here at Cornerstone, you probably know these words well – and if you want to dive deeper into them you can join us at our Justice Calling group in the new year!

- **Shalom** (Flourishing): When we think of Shalom we often think of the concept of peace and that certainly is a big part of it, but this word holds more. Shalom is a sense of rightness – of everything being how it was designed to be and from this rightness flows a deep flourishing of people.
 - Isaiah 32:16-17, “Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness will dwell in a fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.”
- **Mishpat** (Justice): Mishpat is the Hebrew word for justice – the process that leads towards shalom. It means treating people equally, upholding their rights, and caring for others. Throughout the Bible this word is often linked to care for those who are continually named as vulnerable in the Bible– the widows, orphans, marginalized, foreigners, and the poor.
 - Isaiah 1:17, “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”
 - Micah 6:8, “He has showed you, O man, 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.”
- **Tsedaqah** (Righteousness): Tsedaqah is righteousness – becoming morally upright as we lean into a righteous God and His goodness and plans for our lives. Throughout the Bible, tsedaqah and mishpat (righteousness and justice) often go hand in hand in the description of God’s heart for justice and His view of the flourishing of His whole creation.
 - Psalm 33:5, “The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of His unfailing love.”

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

In order to fully understand these words, we need to take a quick look at the Genesis through Revelation story of a God of justice who is on a mission to restore, redeem, and rescue His creation.

- **Genesis:** In Genesis 1 and 2 we see the world was created perfectly, all was right, exactly as it should be. There was shalom, the world was flourishing and there was perfect rightness in all of humanity's relationships – our relationship with God, ourselves, each other, and creation.
 - But it didn't last. Humanity chose power and we abused it. We chose our own way and allowed sin and brokenness into the world.
 - This led to the abuse of power, death, toil, pain, and injustice.
- **Old Testament:** The story of the world was full of injustice, slavery, violence. Sin was everywhere, and of all the sins mentioned in the Old Testament, two stand out as being mentioned the most, idolatry and injustice – sin against God and His people. But even in the midst of idolatry and injustice, God has a plan to bring rescue. He rose up individuals like Abraham and Moses to lead His people and taught them a different way of doing things. He called them to righteousness and justice – a seeking to make things right. A call that directly addressed the two most prevalent sins, idolatry and injustice.
 - In Genesis 18: 18- 19 God calls Abraham to lead His people to, "Keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." He promises to bless Abraham so that he, and his people, can be a blessing to others – to bring righteousness and justice.
 - The rest of the Old Testament follows this same theme, as God continues to call His people to care for the vulnerable. As Moses says in Deuteronomy 10:18, "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing."
- **Jesus:** God looked at our broken world and responded to our injustice in love by giving us the gift of Jesus – the greatest act of loving justice ever performed.
 - In Jesus, God not only sent hope and love into the world, He gave us a blueprint on how to live justly, care for others, and humbly love those around us. When looking at how to live a justice-focused life that pursues the flourishing of others, we need to look at Jesus.
 - Jesus' life what not what many expected. He didn't adhere to all the social norms, He drew near to and welcomed those who were considered outcasts, and He didn't address the big societal justice issues that many people believed the coming Messiah would. Jesus' life was humble and in many ways mundane, but He used the simple day to day actions of life to work the miracles of justice. He fed the hungry, He touched and healed the sick and lepers, He stopped for the woman at the well, He welcomed and ate with those deemed sinners, and he even flipped some tables when He saw the religious exploiting the vulnerable in the temple courts. The gospels are full of stories of Jesus seeing, stopping, naming, and caring for those on the margins.
 - Jesus' life showed a blueprint for living justly, but He was not immune to injustice Himself, He died to injustice. And in His death, He not only rescued and redeemed His creation – He felt the pain of our world so that He can be near to those who suffer and experience injustice today.
 - **Revelation:** On the cross Jesus won the battle against injustice and allowed us a way back to flourishing, justice, and righteousness again. Revelation shows us the end of the

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

story – the promise of a world made right. A world where there will be no more injustice, a world where, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death^[a] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4). A world of perfect shalom, flourishing, rightness – new Eden exactly how God designed it to be.

- **Now:** But in the in between as we wait for the promised future, we are called to bring this freedom to the here and now – to fight in this battle for justice. We are called to be justice bringers.

So this is what Biblical Justice is, but how do we truly live it out? When you think of justice bringers in this world who comes to mind? Often we think of those who are doing the big things – We may think of missionaries who work in with the impoverished in other countries, public figures who lead movements for change, and individuals who lead huge organizations that serve around the world. All of these people are definitely justice bringers and God has gifted them in amazing ways, but we need to be careful to not believe that justice only comes through these big and visible moments or victories. The miracle of justice is also, and more often, brought through the everyday actions of those who are committed to loving God and loving others. It comes when God’s people use their gifts and talents to pursue the flourishing of those around them. It comes when you reach out to check on your neighbours and help in a time of need, when you love your co-workers or classmates even when that is hard to do, when you support organizations who are loving and caring for God’s people here in our community and around the world. I saw justice come in powerful ways over the past few years as our community came together to pursue the flourishing of others in the midst of the pandemic – as people from Cornerstone and the wider Markham Stouffville community wrote cards to our neighbours, filled Food Pantry boxes for families, made thousands of sandwiches, baked goods, and meals for our street friends, assembled hundreds of care bags for those who may have been lonely, delivered groceries, drove to appointments, supported families and projects globally, and so much more. God is using this community to be justice bringers in amazing ways! Jesus loves taking these ordinary moments of our lives and making them extraordinary. He can take these simple and seemingly mundane acts of justice and weave them together into a beautiful movement of love and justice in our world – I have amazed to see how He is doing this here at Cornerstone.

We do not want justice to just be something we do, we want it to be a point of transformation that comes into our hearts, our church, our community, and our culture. We want to be a people of justice who follow closely to a God who is justice. This transformation comes when we lean into God’s calling to righteousness and justice – this comes from loving God and loving others, just as we are commanded in Mark 12:30-31.

Loving God:

- Justice must start within our own hearts as we lean into Christ and grow in righteousness.
- As we move closer to God, we begin to see the world through Jesus’ eyes and He begins to show us the broken places of our world.
 - When I was young I began to see that there were people who lived very differently than me in the world. People who were experiencing really hard things. When I was in high

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

school I began to pray that God would break my heart for what breaks His. This is a scary prayer, but a powerful one, and Jesus responded. He began to open my eyes to issues of injustice in a new way as he showed me His beloved people, He built up a deep passion to see change, and He began to show me the gifts the places that He was calling me to bring justice.

- It is only when we come near to God that our hearts begin to shift and as this happens we are moved by compassion for our brothers and sisters– but compassion is not just an emotion, it is a call to action, the beginning of mission.
- As we draw closer to Jesus who is the blueprint of justice, we will be moved to care for those who bear His image. And through this, the second piece, loving others, will come easier.

Loving Others:

- We cannot truly love God without loving His people. And we cannot truly love His people without being out in the world and moving towards other people.
- In order to bring justice into this world we need to be in the world. We need to step aside from the comfort of our lives and look at the world alongside Jesus and ask Him to show us those places where He is calling us to serve.
- When we move towards people, enter into our communities, and dwell well in the places God has placed us, we start to see the needs emerge. We start to see the places where our neighbours are struggling, we see those people who are not able to make ends meet, we see the ways in which systems have left people especially vulnerable, and we begin to see our place in the solution.

Practical Steps

- **Where is God nudging you:** As we spend time with God and He begins to show us those places of injustice in our world and will begin to nudge us towards certain places or people. Our journeys are all going to look different, but we need to think about what are those places of injustice where you feel stirred to action. What issues of injustice keep you up at night, those things that you would change in a heartbeat if only you had the resources to do it – these are often the places God is leading us to do something.
 - In high school, as I prayed that God would open my eyes to injustice, I remember the first time I learned about human trafficking, that slavery still existed in our world. I remember the discomfort that bubbled up in me, the frustration that systems were allowing this to happen, the deep grief for the pain being experienced. I couldn't get it out of my head, I was mad, but God met me here and lead me to respond.
- **What's in your hands:** When you begin to see those places God may be nudging you to respond to, we need to look at the resources God has given us to respond – When God called Moses to go to Egypt to free His people, God asked Him, "What is in your hands," (Exodus 4:2). What are those things, skills, resources, time, and opportunities do you have that God can use to bring justice?
 - As I was moved to respond to the issue of human trafficking, God led me to create an initiative to advocate and raise money for those experiencing trafficking here in Canada and around the world. God allowed me to use my gifts to lead events, speak, and

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

advocate on behalf of organizations. He placed good people around me to help with different skills to help move this initiative forward.

- Each of us are gifted in different ways and are given different passions and opportunities. Never discredit your giftings – We are all part of a body and when we work together God can do amazing things. I have seen God bring justice through art, tech support, music, through writing, food prep, driving, by giving great hugs, and in so many others ways. We will hear more stories of this next week!
- **Don't be a hero:** As we begin to step into our justice journeys we must remember that we are not heroes who are going to do anything extraordinary! Jesus is the only hero in this story! We are called to be near the God of justice who leads us into His world to spread His love and justice. We need to constantly be reminded that the battle is not ours. God has been in the business of justice far before and will be far after our small piece in the story. When we serve and seek to bring justice, we do this in His strength as He gives us what we need.
- **Don't go alone:** We must also see that the work of justice was never mean to be entered into alone. God calls all of His people, His church, to this mission. We are called to work together, as a body of Christ in our different giftings and abilities to seek God's justice in this world.

What now?

- **Step Forward:** The next best thing we can do, is just take a step forward. Take a look and see where God is already working to bring justice in the world. Where may God be nudging you to step forward? What's in your hands? Think on these things and take a step forward.
- **Learn More:** Want to learn more about justice and how people are bringing justice in this world? Visit our extend page for more books and resources to continue learning. Join us at the Justice Calling semester group and Justice Series in the new year.
- **Serve with us:** If you want to learn more about serving opportunities at Cornerstone, please reach out to me! We also will be launching our Christmas outreaches next week, so be sure to keep an eye out! You can also serve those you come across in your day to day – reach out to your neighbours, send a note to someone who may need encouragement, and look for opportunities to pursue the flourishing of those around you.

Justice is not an easy thing – but it is a beautiful thing. As we get out into the world and move towards people we often are going to face things that are scary or challenging, we will need to put aside our comfort and be willing to enter into the brokenness and mess of this world that's where we meet Jesus. But we must know we never do this alone – we follow a God who carries the scars of this world and the wounds of love. A God who is walking beside us giving us all we need for what He has called us to. A God who longs for the flourishing of each of His children and allows us to a part of that mission. And a God who loves to use our ordinary to bring the extraordinary miracle of justice. And as we begin to seek justice in Jesus and alongside Jesus our hearts will be opened, our lives will become richer, we will know God more fully, and we will begin to flourish in new ways just as we pursue the flourishing of those around us.

An Intro to Biblical Justice: Justice in Jesus

November 7th

Key Points:

- Mark 12:30-31: Justice is what happens in the world when we love God and loves others.
- **Shalom** (Flourishing), **Mishpat** (Justice), and **Tsedaqah** (Righteousness).
- In Jesus, God not only sent hope and love into the world, He gave us a blueprint on how to live justly, care for others, and humbly love those around us.
- We do not want justice to just be something we do, we want it to be a point of transformation that comes into our hearts, our church, our community, and our culture.
- Compassion is not just an emotion, it is a call to action, the beginning of mission.
- **Where is God nudging you:** As we spend time with God and He begins to show us those places of injustice in our world and will begin to nudge us towards certain places or people
- **What's in your hands:** What are those things, skills, resources, time, and opportunities do you have that God can use to bring justice?
- **Don't be a hero:** Jesus is the only hero in this story! When we serve and seek to bring justice, we do this in His strength as He gives us what we need.
- **Don't go alone:** We are called to work together, as a body of Christ in our different giftings and abilities to seek God's justice in this world.
- <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/extend-jesus-love-in-life-mission/>
- Contact Bethany: bethany@cornerstonechurch.ca