

Psalms: Tuning Our Hearts

Part 4

"Take the Long View"

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Tell us about an injustice you've **personally observed**. How did it strike you at the time? Did your evaluation of that event change over time? How? Why?
Did you play a role in that event (either good or bad)? Is there some role you **should** have played?
- Think of a complaint you've observed (at home or work). **Why** is it **so hard** to achieve justice in this life?
- Discuss the following: *"We are required to **do** justice. What we're **incapable** of is the **undoing** all of the injustice in this world. And, any attempt we make to **undo** injustice must be done in godly ways."*
- First Peter 2:23 describes Jesus' approach to life. Think of three examples when he did this.
What does 1 Peter 2:21 say is the connection between Jesus' approach and our own lives today?
What would you have to believe about **God** in order to do this? About **yourself**? About **others**?
- Review the four ways we are to **live in this present, unfair world** (see **Sermon Summary**).
Which of those seem reasonable to you **and why**? Which seem unreasonable—**and why**?
Which do you **most** need to apply?
What help will you need to do so?

Do you have an **eternal** perspective?

Write to:

BiblicalHopeAndHelp@gmail.com

Application-Challenge

In this unjust world:

- Renounce hope in human solutions (Psalm 61). God, our "rock", gives safety. God extends familial hospitality: come into his "tent". God comforts as a mother hen calms her chicks.
- As God's "grapevine", bear the sweet fruit of justice and righteousness (Psalm 80). Repent of any injustice, oppression, or violence for which you may be responsible.
- Check your heart: "noise" in our hearts is a sure sign that we need to repent of pride and haughtiness (ie, concerning ourselves with problems that are too great for us; Psalm 131).
- Rest in the certainty of God's ultimate, perfect justice. Go to God's Word daily to regain perspective. Renounce bitterness and do what you can now to foster justice (Psalm 73).

Sermon Summary

Key Text: Psalm 73

Some years ago a horrible murder took place. A family—stable, church-going, very prominent—had two sons. Ironically, it was an event at church that led to the murder: the pastor complimented the younger brother on his growing faith, and encouraged the older brother to be more like him. The older brother seethed inside—and later killed his brother! When caught, he admitted it to the authorities—and was totally calloused and unrepentant about it. But it gets worse: he got off without any jail time. He was banished to a foreign country, but even there he received special protection from the authorities so that no one would harm him. Eventually he married, raised a family, prospered, became prominent, lived to a ripe old age, and died of natural causes! Every bit of this story is true! Have you ever heard of such injustice? In the same way, today the American “family” is experiencing injustice, jealousy, and violence—and the powerful are “getting away with murder”—with just a “slap on the wrist”. It’s so unjust! These situations raise all sorts of questions—hard questions such as: Why do powerful people get away with evil? Why do oppressive people seem to live such privileged, easy lives? Why are they so often exempt from accountability? Are they above the law? Often, they even seem to “get a pass” on sickness and difficulties. Why is that? They are cruel to others—and then boast about it! Is there no justice? Why do they get everything their heart desires—and the poor get so little? Does God care about injustice? Does he even know this is happening? If God does know but doesn’t care—why should I keep trying to live a moral life? If God doesn’t know or care—then maybe there’s really no god after all! (Or—at the very least—that kind of a god doesn’t deserve to be followed!)

These are just a few of the hard, painful questions that arise from stories of injustice. What do we even do with questions like these? Are answers possible? And, if answers do exist, maybe we don’t want to know them. Maybe it’s true: “Doo doo happens.” The book of Psalms helps us face these tough questions. The Psalms tell us about other peoples’ struggles, giving us a chance to “look over their shoulders” and gain wisdom as we see how they handled terrifying and unjust circumstances in their lives. Psalm 73 serves as a “case study” of the insights that will help us. The psalmist shares his own struggle as he observed injustice around him—and folks “getting off with just a slap on the wrist” (see v. 1-14).

Is the answer to these questions simply that this is a “dog eat dog world”? Others come up with different answers: Let’s do away with today’s political and economic structures and rebuild them with fair and just systems. But sinful people built the current system, and sinful people will build the next one. So, is the world hopeless? No, it is not, but Psalm 73 says that our hope lies beyond, outside of, this sinful, fallen world (see v. 16-20). Mere human observation is not sufficient for untangling and understanding the problem of why injustice seems to go unpunished (v. 16); we need God’s (biblical) perspective (v. 17). Understanding justice requires information that can only come from God. Verses 17-20 & 27 reveal that this life is not the whole story. This earthly life is about as permanent as a dream (v. 19-20). The psalmist was all bent out of shape because during this “earthly blink of an eye”, he saw injustice winning. We need to consider the rest of the story.

This life, the 75 years that go by in the blink of an eye, is a moment when God allows people to make their own choices. Many of those choices will be wicked. But in his sovereign, good wisdom, he has chosen to be patient with every human being during this first, earthly phase of our existence. If God insisted on immediate justice, we’d all be in hell. God says that in this life there is injustice. But he promises that he will bring about complete and perfect justice when we stand before him.

This truth should either comfort or terrify us. The wages of sin is death—eternal separation from God. It would be totally just for God to consign us all to hell. But in love and mercy, God punished his perfect, sinless Son in our place. Jesus offers free and full pardon to all who will admit that we deserve what he received on the cross, who trust in him alone to save us from our sin. Only those who cast themselves on Jesus as Savior will experience God’s mercy, but everyone will experience his justice. Some day there will be perfect justice. But that day is not today. This part of our lives includes injustice. We are required by God to pursue justice in this life. We must fight oppression wherever we see it. But perfect justice will not be achieved until God brings it. When it comes to our own actions, we are required by God to do justice. What we’re incapable of is undoing all of the injustice we see in this world. And, any attempt we make to undo an injustice must be done through godly actions. The end of Psalm 73 instructs us **how to live in this present, unfair world. [1]** We are to live sensibly, without envy and bitterness (v. 21-22). **[2]** We are to live with confidence that God never abandons us, even when we fail him (v. 23-24). **[3]** We are to live with an eternal perspective—happy even if we have nothing but God (v. 25-26). **[4]** We are to find joy in belonging to God—and tell others about it (v. 28).

Oh yes—that story I was telling you... It is the story of Cain and Abel (with a few “updated” details; see Genesis 4). But to hear “the rest of the story” we need to flip to the New Testament (Hebrews 11:4 & 1 John 3:12). Cain may have had a longer earthly life than Abel, but he didn’t “get away with murder”—nobody does. Cain is spending eternity tormented in hell, while Abel is eternally joyful in the presence of God. Yes, there are many injustices in this life. Most of them are not made right in this life. We should fight injustice and be a voice for the oppressed. But we human beings aren’t capable of untangling the wicked mess we’ve made of this world. But God can. And he will. He promises.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five Question Bible Study" (see page below) is a simple way to study any passage. We can use it to better know the God who will bring perfect justice...

Monday—Read Deuteronomy 32:1-4 & 40-43. What do you learn about the justice of God?

Tuesday—Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20. What do you learn about justice in Ancient Israel?

Wednesday—Read Psalm 37:27-31. What is the connection between God's justice and ours?

Thursday—Read Psalm 82:1-4. What would be some applications of this in your life today?

Friday—Read Isaiah 42:1-4. Jesus is the "Servant" spoken of here. What is his connection to justice?

Saturday—***In preparation for worshipping your risen Lord tomorrow with your church family, read 1 Kings 17:1-7.***

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) is it found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text?