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'Things God Loves' Series
#5

"God Loves Justice" Isaiah 61

Introduction

If you could choose between the justice of God and the mercy of God, which would you choose? A lot of Christians would quickly say they'd rather experience the mercy of God. After all, which one of us doesn't know of our own sin and offenses of God? Which one of us doesn't understand that apart from God's mercy to forgive us, we would be quickly consumed by the fire of His wrath?

But think about it for a minute. What if God wasn't just? What if God didn't care about what is right and wrong? What if you could hide your sin from Him so that He wouldn't know what you'd done? Or what if He knew, but didn't have the power to do anything about injustice and sin?

If God didn't love justice – if He were not just - sin would no longer be a concern for any of us. Mercy would become irrelevant. Sin would reign in all of creation . . . But God is just and God loves justice. Today we are going to see that the justice of God gives us hope that in the end peace, righteousness and holiness will prevail. Every wrong will be paid for. It is because of the justice of God that we need the mercy of God because all of us have failed to live righteously as we ought to live. So justice and mercy cannot be separated. We need both. And so it is that justice and mercy are

joined by God through the glorious work of Christ on the cross. So let's see how God loves justice.

[Isaiah 61]

What is justice? Justice is one of the attributes of God. God is just. It is a manifestation or the administration of His holiness. The words *just and righteous* are the same words in the Greek language. To speak of His justice is to speak of His righteousness. Because God is just, He always does the right thing.

But this attribute of justice is also a communicable attribute – that is, it is something that is shared by men because we are created in the image of God. So when we think of justice among men, we should think about being ruled rightly. We think about living rightly. We think about every person being dealt with rightly. So a just society is one with righteous laws, and righteous judges and each person getting exactly what they deserve.

We need to understand that this is exactly how God created the world. In Eden before the fall perfect justice prevailed. The law of God was given to direct Adam and Eve. God walked about as the perfect judge – rewarding the righteous with great fruitfulness; and punishing sin when it entered the world.

But what about now? How does justice come on earth today? Has it gone out the window? *Reader's Digest Magazine* has a regular feature called *That's Outrageous!* Where they do nothing more than tell stories of injustice – often highlighting some of the worst judges in America. Those kinds of things reinforce what is an easy observation by all of us. Justice does not always prevail in society right now.

You have no doubt been on the personal end of some injustice or another and know firsthand the pain, loss and anger that comes with it. But you have also, no doubt, gotten away with some things in life. There have been times you done things that were wrong, but you were never caught, disciplined or punished.

That doesn't mean that God has set aside justice for the time being. It doesn't mean that He ignores what is right and wrong. God has established authority on earth to bring about temporal justice.

You probably remember that amazing story in I Kings 3 where God appears to Solomon the new king and makes him an offer. We remember it because of the magnitude of what God said to him. He told Solomon that he could ask for anything he wanted and He would give it to him. Usually when we think of that story we remember what he didn't ask for – because we know how tempted we would have been to ask for those very things. He didn't ask for lots of money. He didn't ask for the fountain of youth (long life). And he didn't ask for God to exact punishment and vengeance on his enemies.

What he did ask for was wisdom. But do you remember why he wanted wisdom? It wasn't for personal gain or for pride. *Give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. And so God gave him his request Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment **to understand justice.***

Solomon understood that God had appointed him king to bring justice among His people.

In I Timothy 2:1-2, God asks us to pray for *kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*

There are three things that are necessary for justice to prevail.

1. Righteous/Holy Standards

Justice is not arbitrary. It's not something that each man can decide for himself. Chaos often reigned in the days of the judges because *each man did what was right in his own eyes.* God has given us His Word to establish justice. And His Word is a revelation of His being. Since God is just; since He is righteous; since He is holy; His very being establishes what is just. And he communicates that to us in the Scriptures. That's why the moral law of God should be the foundation of the other laws of the nation.

2. Knowledge/Wisdom

This is why Solomon prayed for knowledge, discernment and wisdom. In order for justice to prevail the truth must be known. (Story of babies and women in Solomon story – I Kings 3).

Our whole legal system is designed to bring forth witnesses to establish truth. Before justice can be done, the truth must be known. Remember what Ephesians 5:13 says? *All things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.* But it also says that *the fruit of the Light is goodness and righteousness (justice) and truth.*

We know that God is omniscient. He knows everything. God is a just God, not only because He

is holy, but also because nothing is hidden from His view.

3. Authority/Power

It would be possible to have righteous standards; to know the truth about how those standards have been kept or violated, and yet in the end be powerless to do anything about it. Study any place where lawlessness reigns and crime is out of control and what you will find is that there is no power or authority in place to bring justice – or rulers are corrupt.

God does not lack either the authority or the power. He is king over all the earth. Nothing is too difficult for Him. And for now, before the end of the age; in this fallen world, He has established earthly institutions and authorities and given them the responsibility to rule justly. Each has his own realm in which he judges.

In the family, the father is to teach the Word of God to his children. And fathers are warned to not to provoke or exasperate their children.

In the State, God has given rulers to punish evil doers and to reward the righteous. Proverbs 29:4 says *the king gives stability to the land by justice*. And 21:15 says *the exercise of justice is joy for the righteous, but it is terror to the workers of iniquity*.

In the church, God gives elders (we call them ruling elders) to, among other things, guard the church against heresy and immorality.

So these are means that God has established to administer His holiness on earth. Still there are and will be injustices until Christ comes again and the Day of the Final Judgment arrives. The reason is clear. We live in a fallen world and earthly judges in every arena are imperfect. They lack wisdom and

knowledge. They don't always use their authority rightly. They may ignore the standards of God. There is no perfect judge on earth.

So let's see if we can pull all of this together. God is perfectly just. Sin continues to abound – and it continues to be a problem for us personally. God is also merciful. He forgives our sins. How can He be both? How can God be a righteous and just God and still forgive our sin? How can He show compassion and mercy and still love justice?

Turn to Micah 7. There's a fascinating passage here that brings these two together in an amazing way. (Read verses 1-6) There is no justice. Why? Because there is no person who is upright and just. And the judges themselves are corrupt and take bribes. The truth is sometimes injustice seems to reign. Your life may be broken. You may have been sinned greatly against. All around us there is a lack of righteousness.

But it gets worse and a lot more personal.

Look at verses 7-9 (read). What is happening here?

1. The man of God sins. (vs. 9b).
2. God gets angry, because He is righteous, holy and just. He hates sin. (vs. 9a)
3. The enemies of God rejoice. (vs. 8)
 - a. The injustice gap seems wider. (Habakkuk; Psalm 73)
4. He sits in darkness. (vs 8).
 - a. The only light is what we know of God and His promises. But that's enough to keep us from despair.
5. He waits. He perseveres. He expects things from God. He prays. (vs. 7)
6. God takes up his case. But what will He do? He speaks regarding the case. He executes

justice – but will is it justice against me or for me? (vs. 9c)

- a. How can He do that? How can justice be in my favor if I've sinned against the Lord? Justice demands payment of a penalty. The wrath and indignation of God must be satisfied.

This is where Isaiah 61:1-3 come in (read). Jesus Christ turns the wrath of God against me into justice for me because of what He did.

John explained this in I John 4:10 - *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (the averting of God's wrath) . . . vs. 14 - *We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world* . . . vs. 17-18 - *By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.* You see, justice and mercy are joined by the work of Jesus Christ.

7. He brings him into the light where he can see righteousness. (vs. 9)
8. The enemies who are gloating now will be covered in shame. (vs. 10a)

So here is the real beauty of God's justice. Because he is both just and merciful, you can taste of His mercy and see His justice at the cross. And it should give you hope and perseverance in wrestling with your sin. There is hope for your own righteousness in Christ. And there is assurance that the enemies of God will be dealt with justly.

The fullness of God's justice will not be seen until the end of the age. But then you will be in

heaven where righteousness will be the only thing you will see and taste. And the unrighteous will receive their just due. They will be punished and will pay for their sin in hell. No sin will be left hanging. No wrong will be undealt with.

So hope in God. Wait for Him. In your own sin, seek Him and trust in Jesus' work. You will find forgiveness and righteousness in Him.