

# “Justice for All”

September 17, 2017

*Risk-Taking Mission and Service series*

## **SHOW MEDIA - “JUSTICE”**

It’s a powerful statement: “Our faith demands more than awareness.” As we focus on risk-taking mission and service, there’s the call to “Pray and do something.” Remember that the risk-taking part is “all that we do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ, whether or not they will ever be part of the community of faith.” It is about going outside of what is comfortable and recognizing where Jesus is in the world and where we meet him in the world.

And according to Luke, Jesus announces himself with powerful words about serving others - and setting folks free. His words in Luke 4 weren’t anything new to those who heard them. They are originally Isaiah’s words, and Jesus lifts them up as his mission. He has come to literally break the chains that make people feel less than who they are in God’s view. He has come to bring hope.

And the ones Jesus speaks of are the most vulnerable, which again, is nothing new. God has always been concerned for the most vulnerable: the widow and orphan, the immigrant and refugee, the one in prison, the one who’s hungry and thirsty, the one whom society has written off or chosen to ignore.

When Jesus speaks of the year of the Lord’s favor, it’s a promise of freedom. It’s all about liberation. He is the Messiah who will bring redemption. He is the One who will reveal the depth of God’s love for all the world – and all means all – and that will get him into trouble. He is the One who will deliver us from sin and death! The people have been waiting for God’s blessing, and Jesus proclaims that it’s here and now. No more waiting!

Friends, we worship and serve God who is a lover of justice according to the Psalms, God who’s in the business of setting people free from the past and opening up a new future, God who offers second and third and twentieth chances. Have you ever been given a second or third or twentieth chance? It sounds good, right?

It sounds great until we have to allow that to be true for everyone and not just ourselves. Do we really want justice for all? Or just justice for some? I’ll confess: I want justice for myself. I’m grateful that God is merciful and gracious, and abounding in steadfast love. I celebrate it and praise God for it.

But sometimes it’s easy to let it stop with me (and maybe a few other people whom I like!). I want justice for me, but I don’t always extend it very well to others. But here’s the challenge: justice isn’t “just for us.” Justice is a part of God’s nature, and God

calls us to do justice - to make the sacrifices necessary to help others be treated justly and fairly.

**9:00** - How many of us know someone who has been in jail or prison? How many of us have visited someone in jail or prison? My first experience was as a pastor, and I can tell you with all honesty that it changed my life and perspective. I felt for the person in jail. I felt for the family. I felt for the community around the person. It was difficult, and the aftermath of it - finding work, restoring trust and making social connections again, and everything else was very hard.

**11:00** - The reality of human trafficking is hard to wrap our minds around - perhaps because it's hard to believe or not hard to believe, but so painful to consider. But how do we respond? Certainly with prayer, but with action that allows for those who have been victims to find new life.

Our Social Principles - that document that calls us to practical faith and helps us see the connection between the faith we claim and what we do - have something to say about the issues we're focusing on today:

**70x7:** *In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole. Restorative justice grows out of biblical authority, which emphasizes a right relationship with God, self, and community. When such relationships are violated or broken through crime, opportunities are created to make things right.*

**Hope Project:** *Violent, disrespectful, or abusive sexual expressions do not confirm sexuality as God's good gift. We reject all sexual expressions that damage the humanity God has given us as birthright, and we affirm only that sexual expression that enhances that same humanity. We deplore all forms of the commercialization and exploitation of sex, with their consequent cheapening and degradation of human personality. To lose freedom and be sold by someone else for sexual purposes is a form of slavery, and we denounce such business and support the abused and their right to freedom.*

These ministries are responding with that same spirit, and none of this is passive. There's action and engagement! Jesus comes to Nazareth filled with the Holy Spirit, and Jesus goes from here to fulfill this Scripture. And he calls us to follow, so we become a fulfillment of this powerful Word, too. That means will get dirty, dig more deeply, and seek to be more invested in Jesus' mission. Giving our financial resources is important and needed, but we also have to search out and respond to needs and opportunities with our time and other resources.

And Micah's words connect, too. Micah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah probably around 700-730 BC. King Hezekiah responded to God's message through Micah and was a godly king. Yet, Micah spoke against many social sins of the people: greed, injustice, and empty rituals instead of heartfelt faith in God.

King Hezekiah had instituted major reforms that restored Temple worship. The people were doing what was right, but it was as if they were simply going through the motions of faith. They got an "A" for outward change, but there wasn't much inward transformation – not a true heart change. So Micah's message is a boiling down of the 613 commandments in the Law. Micah lifts up three principles: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Justice is something we're called to do and participate in—not something we're called to dream about. It's easy to wish for justice. How many of us wish for it? But if we want to see justice done, we have to take action. It may make us uncomfortable because we have to challenge people and systems that seek to devalue people. Yet, God calls us to work to ensure that all people are valued because they are part of God's family and God's good creation.

We're called to love kindness – not just to be kind, but to love kindness. Kindness is about love, loyalty, and faithfulness. Consider how much God loves the world—enough to send Jesus to show us ultimate love and sacrifice. God's love is timeless and unconditional. Think about a close relationship you have that really matters to you, and why you show kindness to another person. We show true kindness out of love, not out of duty or fear. We're called to be kind to others as God is kind.

In doing justice and loving kindness, we walk with God, knowing that God walks ahead of us, leading us, and also beside us, as a true companion. We're not perfect, but God is. We need God with us, and we need one another. Someone wrote: "God does not want what we own. God wants who we are, or at least, God wants the world to see whose we are."

As we seek God's help and hope to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, let's pray together:

MOVE INTO PRAYER TIME...