

A Time for Judgement

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- [0 : 0 0] You know, one of the deepest longings in the human heart is for justice.
- You may not have thought about one of the deepest longings of your heart is for justice. But I'm going to say that it is.
- And it started when you were a child. It starts when all of us are children. When we utter these words, that's not fair. That's not fair.
- How young are we when we first say that? How young are our children and grandchildren when we first hear from their lips? But it's not fair.
- We've all said these words as children. The truth is, if we've not said them as adults, we've thought them, haven't we?
- [1 : 0 3] Every adult in this room, you have already figured out, no matter how young you are, you've already figured out. This thing about life being unfair doesn't stop at childhood.
- It continues on, doesn't it? We know from experience that this thing about fairness or unfairness, it only gets worse.
- I guess one way to say it is just make it real clear. Life is not fair. And you are denying reality if you think life is going to be fair everywhere you turn in this world.
- You're in for great disappointment. But here's the good news. Life in this world is not all there is. God is going to bring this world as we know it to an end one day.
- And then He is going to create a new heaven and a new earth, the Scripture tells us. And in this new heaven and new earth, everything will be perfect.
- [2 : 1 7] There will only be fairness or justice. Everything will be right. And you'll know it's right in eternity.
- But before He makes all things new, God is going to bring this world to a point of judgment.
- A point of judgment. We saw last week in the book of Ecclesiastes, the first part of chapter 3, there's a time for everything under heaven. There's a time to be born, a time to die, a time to do everything under the heavens.
- Well, this morning we're going to look specifically, there is a time for judgment at the end of our lives. Or we could call it a time for justice.
- I want you to read with me this morning just three verses. Chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. And then chapter 4, verse 1. Let's read it together.
- [3 : 1 6] Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness.
- And in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked.
- There is a time for every matter and for every work. Look now in chapter 4, verse 1. Again, I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun.
- And behold, the tears of the oppressed. And they had no one to comfort them. On the side of their oppressors, there was power.

And there was no one to comfort them. These verses tell us why we need a time of judgment.

[4 : 19] First, a time of judgment is needed because of the widespread wickedness in this world. That's what he's talking about with the word injustice in chapter 3, verse 16.

And the word oppression in chapter 4, verse 1. Look at, if you would, at how the preacher, as the writer of Ecclesiastes refers to himself.

How he describes this particular form of injustice. Verse 16. In the place of justice, before a judge.

In the court system. That's what he's talking about. In the place of justice, even there was wickedness. And in the place of righteousness.

In the place before the judge, before the court. We expect things to be done rightly. We expect right to take place.

[5 : 18] And in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. He's talking about an unjust judge.

An unjust court system. The very place that we expect the right thing to be done.

Fairness to prevail. The very place we expect and most need to experience justice. He's telling us, sometimes it turns out to be a place of unfairness.

This is not merely a frustrating experience, although it would be. He's talking about a demoralizing situation. Look at how Martin Luther, the reformer, described this.

He said that the preacher is not complaining because there is wickedness in the place of justice, but because the wickedness in the place of justice cannot be corrected.

[6 : 19] I want you to think about it. If you can't find justice when you go to court. If you can't find it when you stand before a judge.

You're not going to be able to find it. It's not going to be a possibility. The judge who is supposed to be fair and impartial.

If he's not, there's no hope that we'll be treated fairly. That's the picture he's painting here. Injustice is everywhere.

He does not imply that every court's that way, every judge is that way, every person you know is that way. He's talking about what we all know, generally speaking, life is not fair.

Now the problem with oppression in chapter 4, verse 1, is equally hopeless. The oppressors, it says, were the people in power. The people who were suffering, people who were being oppressed, taken advantage of, mistreated, they had no power.

[7 : 30] It's the ones who were oppressing them, mistreating them, taking advantage of them. They were the power brokers. And as such, what could people do?

It's hopeless. You know, we live in a world filled with people in this same kind of situation. Let's just think for a moment, away from our country, right this very moment.

There are tens of thousands of Christians who live in fear because they are a minority, a persecuted minority where they live.

There are Christians this morning who have no home to go to because they've been put out by their family who is of another faith, and they consider their child, even as an adult, who has professed faith in Jesus.

They consider that child to have become a pagan. They consider that they no longer live, even, in some of them's sight. There are communities today where a person who's become a Christian, he can't work.

[8 : 40] They won't let him have a job. They won't let him make a living for his family. There are people right now, in this world, this moment, breathing the same air we are. They're suffering all because of their faith in Jesus, and they're suffering unjustly at the hands of their family members, their community, their government.

Some of them are in prison right now. Here's what's so sad. There's not one thing they can do about it. There's nowhere on earth for them to turn.

There's no one who can really help them, make things right for them. Let's look closer to home now.

In this country, think about how many women suffer abuse at the hands of wicked and cowardly men who threaten to kill them if they tell anyone or if they call the police.

They're afraid because of the power being exerted over them, they're afraid to do anything. Children are horribly abused by their own wicked parents or by a wicked parent's boyfriend or girlfriend.

[10 : 05] We read about it all the time. Whether you get your news from the newspaper, online, on TV, mugshots every day, new ones nearly every day, of people in upstate South Carolina who are beating, some even killing their spouse or girlfriend.

Parents not just beating but torturing their children. That is happening here in the upstate, here in Pickens County.

And many of these children are either too young to know what to do, too young to tell, or they're too afraid to say anything.

But when an abused woman or child does tell, when they do muster up the courage, they take the risk, it doesn't automatically mean they're going to be rescued.

The courts and social agencies, they have more cases than they have people to work. There's a backlog. And then sometimes, some of those severe cases, when they do get dealt with, there are situations where the abuser's dealt with too leniently.

[11 : 28] And the court does nothing. The social agency won't remove the child. And so the abuser continues. And there's no protection for the victim.

There's no hope. One of the most frustrating examples of injustice in this country is the way our United States Supreme Court allows the execution of innocent babies in their mother's womb by abortion.

Now the Supreme Court justifies themselves. They say it is a mother's choice, and that's the end of it. But the voice of truth and justice clearly said, it's a baby's life.

Now you think about it. In this country, one of the greatest examples of wickedness in power is the United States Supreme Court's rulings like this.

It's all about the woman's choice. And that little baby with a heart beating, fully human, living individual has no one to speak for them.

[12 : 51] And so at the whim of a mother, at the scalpel of a doctor, their lives are taken, destroyed.

The world is filled with people who oppress the weak, care nothing about people being treated fairly or justly.

But the Bible is clear that God takes a strong stand against such people. I want you to hear me.

God takes a strong stand against all abusers, whether they break the law or not. God hates a lack of justice.

He hates those who oppress, take advantage of people because they can. God opposes all who abuse their power and privilege by mistreating people.

[13 : 54] The Old Testament prophets are filled with all kinds of warnings about such. The book of Zechariah lists the kinds of people who are most likely to be oppressed. I want you to look at the list here.

Widows, orphans, foreigners, actually aliens living in the land, and the poor. You need to understand, God has a special place in His heart for the widow, for the orphan, for the alien living in His land, and for the poor.

And if God has a special place in His heart for them, so should we as God's children. Look back in chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. The preacher wants us to know that while we live in a world of much injustice and oppression, it's not always going to be that way.

The day of judgment will come. Look at verse 17 again. God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. We need to take comfort in that statement if we're believers.

That should encourage us. God will one day make everything right. We can trust Him to do that.

[15 : 17] He said He would and He will. That does not mean that we should give up on the idea of trying to do what we can to make things just, to try to help people become treated fairly.

We need to do whatever we can to oppose oppression and injustice in this world, in this community. Everywhere. You know, we ought to do more as people of the community, voters, people who are able to run for office, we ought to do more to try to create situations where the court has to act quicker than they do.

Where social agencies are forced to get involved in these crisis situations where children and women's lives are on the line. We need to support Christian organizations that are trying to help victims of abuse, women who've been abused, children and the poor.

We need to help these agencies. We need to be a part of them. And we can and must take responsibility to make sure our home and our church are safe places where injustice and abuse are not tolerated.

You know, we're trying to do what we can here at the church, making every effort on this church campus to provide a safe environment. A lot of things are taking place. Not just physically, but emotionally.

[16 : 54] You know, if you ever want to work with children or youth, or you're a part of that, you're asked to do background checks. And we're being asked to do that every year now, I believe the situation is.

And you think, that's a pain. It sure is. It's just plain aggravating. And it costs us money to do a background check on everybody every year. But I want to tell you something. Children are worth it.

Because we want to ferret out any possible child, abuser, or molester. And there'll be no tolerance. This will be a no tolerance zone when it comes to the safety and well-being of our children.

No tolerance zone here for the welfare of our children. But there ought to be that in your home. Think about it.

You need to make sure that your home is a safe place emotionally as well as physically. And one of the best ways to do that is for you as parents and as children to make sure that Jesus Christ really is the Lord of your home.

[18 : 09] To make sure it is He who is building your home. Because the psalmist tells us if He's not the one building those who labor, labor in vain. We have a responsibility as individual Christians, as a church, as a community, to do anything that we can to promote justice.

That which is right for people and especially people who cannot do it for themselves. But the sad truth is no matter how hard we try, as long as we live in this fallen world, there is going to be oppression and injustice.

Women and children are going to continue to be abused. Police officers are going to continue to do their best to fight crime. Some of them are going to be killed in the line of duty as they are trying to enforce the laws and bring about justice for everyone.

This is sad to say, but there is always going to be corruption in government and business. There is always going to be corruption where people are. Because we are sinners at heart.

Now, while we don't have the power or wisdom to end all injustice and oppression, God does. And He promises to do so one day.

[19 : 34] Look next. A time of judgment is coming that will confirm that the universe God created is ultimately just or fair. Here in Ecclesiastes, the preacher makes it clear throughout his book, life's going to end for everybody one day.

Face the reality. No matter what you do, no matter what you build, no matter what you acquire, you're going to lose it all one day because you're going to die and you can't take it with you. And when death comes, we will all stand before God and give an account of how we've lived.

There's going to be a day of judgment, He says, for the righteous and the unrighteous. But it is also strategically repeated. This same statement about judgment is strategically repeated as the very last sentence of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Look, in chapter 12, verse 14, for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing for the good or evil. See, the writer of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, he wants us to be clear.

In the end, it matters how we live because we're going to stand before God and give an account of how we've lived. Now, one of the things that we need to understand, God's judgment is good.

[21 : 00] It has many good purposes. One is, it reveals God, that God is concerned. He does care about justice or fairness in this world. When Paul tells, think for a moment, God cares about things being right, people being treated properly.

God's no respecter of persons. The apostle Paul helps us understand how God wants things to be, intends for things to be, and will make things one day. Look at what Paul said to slaves who were being mistreated by their masters.

They couldn't rebel, they couldn't do anything. He tells them to be submissive to their masters, and he assures them that God will one day make all things right. Look at it. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

He's saying, you can't help what's going on, and you can't do anything about it as a lowly slave in the Roman Empire. But God, he is not partial to the slave owner.

That person who's abused you will be paid back for the wrong he has done. The word of God says. Paul found comfort in that idea himself.

[22 : 25] He demonstrated that he was trusting God to take care of his own enemies. Here's a good example. In his letter to Timothy, look at what he said. He's writing to Timothy for like his son in the faith, Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm.

The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. Paul didn't say, but I'm just going to let it go.

He was concerned because the great harm was Alexander was opposing Paul's ministry, opposing the gospel, opposing the word of God. Look at it, what he goes on to say.

Now, beware of him yourself for he strongly opposed our message. One way to say this, Paul is saying, he'll reap what he's sown.

He has harmed me, but the Lord will pay him, repay him according to his deeds. He's going to reap what he's sown. God is just. He's going to make everything right. You know, you may be sitting there thinking to yourself, I have suffered unjustly in the past.

[23 : 49] And you're still having a hard time dealing with it. In fact, you may be sitting here and the truth is you're plotting your revenge. You've been plotting your revenge for years. It could be that you're just unwilling to forgive that person.

It may be that you're just, you've let it make you bitter. And vengeful. You won't even consider the idea of forgiveness. It could be that you're just, you're not going to do anything yourself, but you're watching and waiting and maybe even praying that that person who's hurt you, that they will suffer some kind of tragedy and you'll get to see them suffer just as they made you suffer.

Well, as Christians, we know that such attitudes are wrong, but let's be honest, they're understandable. Such attitudes are understandable, but before God they are unacceptable.

Scripture is clear. Look at this from Romans chapter 12. Paul says, do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right, just, in the eyes of everyone.

As we live in this world as Christians and people wrong us, it is not pleasing to God for us to just wrong them back.

[25 : 16] As Christians, we have a responsibility. No matter what happens to us, we need to do what's right. Now, to do what's right doesn't mean that you become a doormat to the world.

Doesn't mean you have, you cannot defend yourself or your family. But this idea of always getting revenge, always giving back what somebody gave you or worse, that's not, that's not how God calls us to live.

We are responsible not for what people do to us, but what we do to people. And just, that's a good way to say it. Be careful to do what's right. You do what's right.

You do what's honorable, the ESV says. Do what's right in honorable eyes of everyone. The Bible clearly tells us not to seek revenge, but it does not say, well, just forget about the injustice that has happened to you.

it does not say, forget about how you were mistreated. No. It tells us to trust God to avenge us.

[26 : 30] There is going to be payback for those who have wronged us. There is going to be payback for the wicked people in this world who have abused and oppressed people that they had power over.

But God's going to do it. Look at chapter 12 of Romans again, verse 19. He says, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

God is not just letting everything go in this life and just sort of, God's not just giving up and said, the world's unjust, just forget about it.

God's keeping records. God settles scores. I want you to look at a lengthier statement, one of the strongest statements along this line in the New Testament.

It's found in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Paul is writing to Christians who have experienced a lot of persecution. They've suffered for their faith. Look at what he says.

[27 : 36] God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well.

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. At the second coming of Christ, that's when the Lord's going to wind everything up in this world.

That's when there'll be a day of judgment. And after that, there will be the new heaven and new earth. Look at what else he says. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

But he will not punish those who do know God and those who have believed the gospel of the Lord Jesus. See, as Christians, when it comes to our eternal destiny, if our faith and trust is truly in Jesus, then the penalty for our sins has been paid by him.

And his righteous, perfect life has been credited to us through faith in him. We do not have to worry about that kind of judgment, a punitive judgment.

[28 : 58] But let's read on. those who do not believe the good news about Jesus, those who do not know God, look at the next sentence, they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

This includes you because you believed our testimony to you. God will make everything right. He promises his people to wait on him and to count on him.

The world we live in is filled with injustice and oppression. If we can do something about it, it's our duty to act. If we can do something, we should do something.

We can't right every wrong. And we cannot make life in this world fair. But as God's people, we can be confident that God will.

He will right every wrong. He will, as Paul says, pay back trouble to those who've troubled you. He'll wipe away every tear. He'll wipe away every tear that's been shed as a result of abuse, of oppression, and injustice.

[30 : 30] One day, God's going to make everything right. He's going to make everything peaceful. He's going to make everything and every day joyful. He's going to make everything perfect for his faithful people.

and he's going to do this for all eternity. We can count on it. This is how we'll live forever. You know, we can't, we can't often see how.

And it may never make sense to us, but God can and does use sin and evil and failure and futility and suffering for his eternal good purpose.

Like I say, we can't see how sometimes. You may be going through something right now or have gone through something and you think, I don't see how any good can ever come from it. That's a fact. But in the big scheme of things, God is working everything according to his good purpose and in the end, he's going to make everything right.

And the ultimate example of this is the crucifixion of Jesus. The greatest evil that has ever taken place in this world was the execution of the Son of God on the cross.

[31 : 49] Jesus was a perfect man, but he was killed, crucified as a criminal. That great act of evil became the greatest act of love and goodness because it resulted in the salvation of sinners.

Our salvation if we're trusting in Jesus. This helps us see that God really is working out his good plan in this evil world. We just have to trust him.

And I want to ask you as a Christian, living in this unfair world, experiencing various kinds of injustice, are you trusting God?

Are you doing what you know to do? Are you doing what's right for yourself and trusting God to take care of your enemies? Trusting God to do whatever needs to be done to make things right?

Are you just seeking to be with his help, with his spirit's power who lives in you, are you seeking to do what you can do and be faithful to do what's right because you're trusting God to take care of all that's wrong, that you have no power or ability to do anything about?

[33 : 11] Or could it be this morning that you need to begin a relationship with God? It could be all the things we're talking about this morning. The problem is you know that you're an oppressor of some people.

You may know that you are an abuser, maybe not in the way of breaking the law, but in other ways of some other people. Maybe this morning what God has done is shown you that you're the one who needs to fear judgment because you're living for yourself.

You're living opposed to God. And that should scare you. Hopefully that will wake you up. And the good news is Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners.

And if you'll admit your need and humble yourself and turn from your sin and trust Jesus, call upon him to save you now, he will do that. He will do that now.

Scripture tells us that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But I want to close with a word to Christians. We, we can be guilty.

[34 : 28] Maybe at home, maybe at work, maybe among certain group of friends or acquaintances, we can be oppressors at times.

We can be abusers. Verbally, emotionally, psychologically, as well as physically. And I want you to hear that if you're feeling guilt because that word abuser, that word unfairness, that applies to you a lot of times.

Oppression, taking advantage of people. You need to understand you're not pleasing to God that way. You're never going to have a right relationship with him or to people.

That's how you're living. And so it could be that as a Christian, you know it's wrong. And on a good day, when all is calm, you have no problems.

But when you get under stress, things don't go your way, you just explode and this stuff comes out of your mouth. It's seen in your face. It's felt by your actions and attitudes by people that you really do love and don't want to hurt.

[35 : 56] But if that's the case, you need to confess your sin to God. You need to humble yourself and seek his forgiveness and you need to humble yourself and beg the forgiveness of those you've abused or oppressed or mistreated.

They know it and you know it and God knows it. God wants us to right all the wrongs that we can and we can be confident that those we have no power over, he'll right them one day on the day of judgment.

Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to see how we should respond right now. Each one of us is an individual.

It's part of this church, part of this community. Father, help us to hate injustice, oppression, wherever it's found.

Help us to confess our sin if it's found in our lives. Help us to intervene if it's taking place somewhere where we know it and we can do something about it.

[37 : 16] But Lord, help us in situations where we are powerless. Help us, dear God, to trust you and to be confident that one day, the day of judgment, if not before, you will avenge your people.

You will make things right. Give us that faith and help us to do what we know to be right regardless of how people treat us.

In an attitude of prayer, listen to the Lord and obey him. Do what he's calling you to do. He's calling you to trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Do that now. If I could pray with you, I'll be here at the front and would love to do that during this time.

Just listen to the Lord and obey him.