

Justice: Resolution 3c

PHBF 10.31.10

TEXT: Luke 4:18-19

SCR. READING: Luke 4:14-21

Words for kids:

SERIES: The Story of PHBF: Who We Are and What We're About

MLK: "I Have a Dream" – Aug 28, 1963

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity....

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." [Amos 5:24]

REVIEW

- The PHBF Story summary
- The 5 resolution values
 - Spiritual – alienation from God (judgment, vanity, guilt) → MISSION
 - Psychological – alienation from self (anxieties, obsessions, underachievement, depression) → GROWTH
 - Social – alienation from others (family strife, isolation, racism, sexism) → FAMILY, CHURCH, JUSTICE
 - Physical – alienation from the material world (disease, disaster)

Justice has been a long-neglected, long-misunderstood topic especially among more theologically conservative churches like ours. Why is that? One of the most common reasons is that many churches have failed to read the Bible as one unified story, which is what we are trying to do in this sermon series. If we're going to understand justice properly, we can't just focus on ourselves in the middle of the story and ignore the beginning and the end of the story. If we do that, we will miss a big part of why we're here, especially the church's role in advancing justice.

Four points re: Justice: meaning, people, time, motive. **[Note debt to John Piper, Bob Glenn, and Tim Keller on this subject. Also note how grateful I am to be part of a church that cares for practical needs—support for the R family, Dinner's Ready, adoption, Thanksgiving Baskets...]**

THE MEANING OF JUSTICE

It's impossible to understand biblical justice unless we first understand the biblical concept of *shalom* (OT) or what the NT calls *blessedness*. When God originally created the world, Genesis 1:31 says He looked it all over and saw that everything was "very good." Everything was in its place. The world God created was perfectly suited for life – human and animal – and flourishing. In short, the world enjoyed *shalom*.

Putting it in a word picture, to say the world enjoyed *shalom* is to say the fabric of the universe was perfectly woven together. Every single thread was interwoven and interdependent – no tears, no frays, no loose strings.

Humanity's fall into sin shredded the fabric. One theologian calls sin "vandalism"—a willful and destructive attack on God's *shalom*. Instead of the perfect integration of a tightly woven fabric, sin produced all sorts of breakdown and disintegration: spiritual disintegration, psychological disintegration, social and physical disintegration.

Justice, then, is simply weaving the fabric back together wherever it is torn or frayed. It's the restoration of *shalom*.

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight — a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.

~ Neal Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, p 10

Biblical justice is not about individual rights; it's about togetherness, interdependence, integration.

ILL: a neighborhood community where people look out for each other, share weekend BBQs together, watch each other's kids = societal *shalom* – everyone's life is webbed together

Two practical reasons we have to start with creation to understand justice properly.

First, it validates the Christian story as true and compelling. The justice aspect of the Christian story collides MASSIVELY with what is currently the most prominent cultural story. If Darwinian natural selection is the true story of the world, injustice isn't outrageous; it's assumed. In a world based on the survival of the fittest, there is no rational basis for concern over violence, random disorder, and injustice. Only when your story tells you that God originally created the world in perfectly integrated *shalom* do you have reason for outrage against disintegration.

APP: Engagement in justice gives us a powerful opportunity for evangelism at the worldview level. Our ministry of mercy confronts their worldview because, no matter what they tell themselves intellectually, inside they know the world should be a better place and they just need a compelling worldview/story to explain that knowledge to them. At the root of our worldview is love – God created the world in love, and when it fell into sin He redeemed it again in love. There is a story where self-assertion is the only option that makes sense; but in our story, sacrificial service for the common good is the norm.

Second, it helps us make sense of Jesus' ministry and preaching. If you were going to pick a passage in Isaiah to explain the Jesus' ministry, which one best does that? Isaiah 53, right? But He turned to Isaiah 61, and He reads all this stuff about "helping the poor, liberating captives, giving sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed." Why?

Jesus didn't come merely to get people ready for heaven; He brought a little bit of heaven down to earth to them. He came to restore *shalom*. Often in Jesus' ministry, we see preaching directly connected with healing or spiritual deliverance.

Luke 7:20-22 ²⁰ *And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'"* ²¹ *In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.* ²² *And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."*

Luke 9:1-2, 6 *And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ... ⁶ And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.*

The purpose of God in redemption is not just to save the elect out of the world, but to renew and restore the entire creation. Jesus didn't come merely to save souls. He came to restore *shalom* to the whole creation. His resurrection from the dead is a foretaste of the resurrection, not just of our own physical bodies, but of the entire created order.

Justice was a prominent emphasis in the Law, it came to the fore in the Prophets, it recurs in the life of Jesus, it is in view in Acts and the history of the early church, and we're reminded of it again in Revelation.

At the end of the Bible, we don't see God scooping up a basketful of His special people to have them live with Him in heaven forever. Rather, heaven comes down to earth and radically cleanses it of evil, disease, injustice, and death. Our purpose must be not just to create a great

church but to create a great suburban community. We are here for the good of the whole city.

THE RECIPIENTS OF JUSTICE

Who is justice aimed at? Jesus' reading from Isaiah names "the poor, captives, the blind, the oppressed." And verses 25-27 show that He wasn't thinking of these categories in exclusively Jewish terms. He took the grace of His kingdom preaching and healing beyond the borders of Israel to Gentiles. Yes, there is a priority: 1) people in our own church, 2) people in our immediate neighborhood, 3) people in the larger city in which we live.

Why should we concern ourselves with these people?

Isaiah 58:6-7 *"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"*

According to the Bible's understanding of *shalom*, our lives are all woven together. They are "my own flesh." Their poverty is my poverty, their oppression is my oppression, their injustice is my injustice.

ILL: "We are the World" – "we're saving our own lives" is a true lyric

Admittedly, this is complex, and it's just as easy to make things worse, creating systems of dependency... (ILL: Mueller – orphanages, Wilberforce – abolition, Jeffryes – Children of Promise learning centers)

APP: Our church needs deacons to spearhead this function.

APP: Do we want to say something here about restoring gender relationships – having women function in all the ways the Bible allows them to?

THE TIME FOR JUSTICE

Notice the word "today" in v 21. It's the first word of the sentence, the place of emphasis. What He's saying is stunning, not just because He is claiming to be the Messiah but also because He is claiming to be

inaugurating the Messianic age right here, in the present, immediately, in the now.

The Jewish concept of history split all time into two great ages: the Present Age and the Age to Come. The Present Age was filled with evil, the curse, oppression, disintegration. The Age to Come was going to be marked by the Messiah's reign, a reversal of the curse, prosperity, renewal, and the restoration of *shalom*. They read Isaiah 61 as belonging to the Age to Come.

Yes, something more is coming—"today" implies a coming "tomorrow" when God's patience will run out and judgment will come. But for now, we are enjoying a 2,000-year "today" of Messianic blessing. The kingdom of God has come, and the ministry of Jesus (and His followers) is to proclaim this good news of God's kingdom everywhere we go (cf. 4:43-44).

Matthew 5:14-16 ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

THE MOTIVATION FOR JUSTICE

Justice isn't another duty to be added to our list. A heart for the poor, a social conscience "sleeps" in the heart of every true believer until they hear teaching on justice or see the call for it in the Bible. Then that heart awakens and begins to search for some expression.

We can cultivate our social conscience two ways. It starts when we begin to see other's needs as our own needs. Our lives are meant to be interwoven with theirs. Jesus didn't come simply to save you FROM something. He saved you TO something – the original purpose for which you were created.

Second, we can cultivate our social conscience by meditating on the cross. Verses 29-30 foreshadow for us how the promised deliverance and renewal will ultimately come—namely, through an assault on His

person and ultimately through His death. The cross casts its shadow forward all the way to the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

The gospel removes any sense of superiority, either from our material situation or our beliefs and morals. We remember what's it is like to be poor, outcast, addicted, overwhelmed, hopeless. If we don't, we don't rightly know what we were when Jesus found us and saved us.

Hebrews 13:12-16 ¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Jesus saved you, not just through His words, but through His deeds. The more you think about Him going outside the camp for you, the more your social conscience will awaken and you will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

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