

GOD, WHERE IS YOUR JUSTICE? + + +

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Good morning church at all of our locations. As we continue this series, "Where's God?", I think one of the questions we always ask ourselves is, where's God when evil's winning? When it seems like injustice flourishes? When we look around and we cry out, "It's not fair."

We've spent the past few weeks talking about where's God, and we've said, "God, do you even hear us?" And I think today it's not "God, do you hear us?" It's more like, "God, are you even watching? Are you even seeing? Where are you? Are you even present in this?" Every single one of us has asked this question in one way or another. You ask this question, "Where is God?" because it feels like evil is flourishing, wickedness wins, and when we say "that's not fair," or when you say "that's horrible, that's terrible, I can't believe that would happen," this is when we're asking ourselves, "Where's God when injustice surrounds us?"

As we look at this today, I want to invite you to think about that because it does feel like, at times and for long seasons, and to be honest, just all the time, that injustice is ignored by God. It can be ignored by us; we can say, "Oh, I can't do anything about that," whatever, but then we also go, "But God, you are the one who should do something about that. Why aren't you?" And so it just feels like that happens. And so what do we do when injustice feels like it's winning?

Right, like when we sit there and you know the justice scales, you remember these, right? We sit there and on one side we've just got the constant corruption that just kind of wins. The people that are wealthy and unkind just keep winning. The people that want to bully our kids just keep winning. The people who don't care about other people just keep on winning. Or we sit there and say the jerk who's the boss just keeps getting promoted and their life seems better. Or the bully in our school, they're just the popular ones, no one sees them or the person who drives—right? It's even as little as this: the person who drives, and we see that they're running the red light, and then we're driving five miles over the speed limit and we get pulled over, right? And you're just like, "Hey officer, what about those people?" Where's God? It feels like the justice scales just are constantly tipped in this way.

I'd like to say to you, that's going to be momentary, that this is all going to stop in the next year or two years or give you a timeline there, but I can't. And here's why: because this has not been an issue just in your life; this has been an issue throughout the scripture. We cry out with the same psalmist, Asaph, who cried out about this. And I want to read to you from Psalm 73, verses 1 through 3 and 12 through 14. When you see it in red at all campuses, I invite you to read those words along with me: "Surely God is good to Israel."

Let me stop for a second here real quick. I'll just leave that there. Surely God is good. I think what happens right here is Asaph is actually doing what I talked about last week that people mock me a little bit for. I think Asaph is saying words to create his world, and why is he doing that? Because I think he's looking around and going, everything's bad and the flourishing is happening by the wicked and the

unjust, and so right now he's actually telling himself something that he believes but he can't see is true.

Let me put this into your perspective so you can use it through this week and through your life. Sometimes you're going to need to tell yourself something that you believe but you can't see is true. We do that to remind ourselves that what I see and what I feel isn't always my reality. And in the midst of injustice, when we think it will never get better, it's always going to be unfair, that God doesn't see us, God doesn't see what's happening—that's not the reality, even though it sure seems like it.

So he says: "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I nearly had lost my foothold; for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Because this is what the wicked are like—they're always free of care. They go on amassing wealth. And surely in vain I've kept my heart pure and have washed my hands of innocence all day long. I've been afflicted and every morning brings new punishments."

Here he is just saying it's never getting better. He wakes up and turns on the news cycle and all of a sudden the corrupt are even getting greater in their corruption. Life is going better for the wicked. Everyone is making more money. Everyone is getting more things, and he just keeps going. And then not only are they getting better, but things are happening to him, and he's getting worse. His punishments are happening to him even more.

We've all experienced these things. We've all had them, and it's hard sometimes to trust God's justice when things seem unfair. When I was in Uganda, we saw corruption and wealth at the expense of others like I had never experienced before. In Uganda, every single person is living day by day, barely surviving. Matter of fact, I would say that for them, there are so many things that are trying to take them out of this world.

I asked the question one day, "I don't see a lot of people smoking cigarettes. Is that not a thing?" And they said, "Yeah, for some reason here, tobacco has never really taken off." And I said, "You know what? In a world and in a civilization here where everything else is trying to kill them, we don't need to add something else." And that's what's happening. But then you look, and you have politicians who continually are rigging the system to get elected, are wealthy, not living in huts, but in beautiful houses that have everything they need—cars, phones, all the things. And the people just say, "This is the way it is; it's unfair."

We have some stuff here that we find ourselves almost resigned to. I think about this: when we were over there, someone said, "Well, in America you guys have your school shootings." And that really hit me hard. I hadn't really thought of it in that respect before, but it's true: school shootings are a problem in our country. They're not a world problem. This is not something happening in other countries, developed or undeveloped nations; this is something that happens here.

We find ourselves saying, "Oh, this is terrible," and it is. When you think about one of the most unjust things to happen to someone is that a child can be in school, and someone, either a classmate or an older classmate or an adult, decides they are going to randomly take out the lives of children. We have to have drills for children to learn to hide and be quiet or to escape and run and flee. We've made this something that we've said, "Yeah, this is our problem," and yet it still keeps happening, and it's unjust—unfair isn't even the right word; it's just flat out wrong.

We look at it and say, "Where are you, God? How are you the God who knows everything, who sees everything, who has all the power? How is this even allowed?" It hurts. It hurts racial oppression, social, societal, economic oppression, and even injustice in just our daily living.

In Macomb, Michigan, on November 7, 2016, a giant high school on 21 Mile Road—this was an old farming community that had grown tremendously quickly through the 90s and early 2000s, from farms into houses and schools. One of the local high schools had 2,800 students and was still on this two-lane highway with no streetlights. On November 7, 2016, a 14 or 15-year-old boy was walking home from a school dance. The road was pitch black because there weren't any streetlights. A driver inadvertently didn't see the boy walking on the side shoulder because there were no sidewalks, and he was tragically hit and killed.

"Where are you, God? How does this happen?" The people cried out, "What is going on? What is going on?" Injustice happens even when we look at that, and let's say that's not intentional injustice, it's still an injustice. A 14-year-old's life is gone, a family is destroyed, and a community is saying, "What's going on?" This is what Asaph was crying in Psalm 73. This is what we cry out still to this day: what's happening? Why is there injustice in our world? And what do we do about it?

So the first question I would ask you is, what's your posture? What's your posture right? When we look at injustice, where do we stand as Christians? What's our posture in this? I think we often ask the question and stand and look at injustice and say, "Where are you God? Aren't you seeing it? Why aren't you doing something about it? Where are you God?"

I want to ask a different question: where are you in the midst of the injustice? I think we have to ask ourselves, whether that injustice is on a global scale like corruption, on a national scale like racial oppression, on a community scale like local darkness or people running red lights, or whether that injustice is in our families and friends, or whether it's something happening to us individually when we say, "Where are you, God?" we have to also ask the question, "Where am I?"

That's where we look with the psalmist but then enter in because oftentimes, when we are struggling with justice in our world and our lives, we stand on the outside and say, "Where are you God?" and forget about who our God is. We have to enter in, and where do we enter into? The sanctuary. Psalm 73:16-17, Asaph says, "When I tried to understand this."

Now, please understand this. I think this is an issue when we talk about "when I try to understand this," we're not talking about understanding on a mental or cognitive level because we can never wrap our minds around why atrocities and innocent pain happen to those who are innocent. We can't understand that.

What we can understand and remember is that oppression and injustice are part of human brokenness. If you look throughout all of human history, when the oppressed get into power, do you know what they do? They don't say, "Oh, we remember what that felt like; we're never going to do that again." No, they begin to oppress. That's because the fabric of our world is broken.

So when he says, "When I tried to understand all this," this is an understanding of "Oh, okay, I get that now, that's going to be okay." This is an understanding of "When will this be solved? When will God do something about this?" It troubled him deeply till he entered the sanctuary of God.

And why? What I believe is when he enters the sanctuary of God—and this is why I ask the question "Where am I?" when I'm struggling with injustice—is not asking if I'm in the midst of the injustice; I'm asking, am I coming back to my God? Am I coming to the throne room of God? Am I coming to His holy sanctuary? Then, am I remembering who He is?

You see, when we come into the throne room of God, we are reminded that if God is seated on His throne, He is the sovereign Lord.

It is that understanding: when I try to understand all this and say injustice happens, I have to recognize I don't have control of when justice will be executed. It's not my control, not your control. When we stand in the throne room, Christ is seated on the throne; He's the King, and it is His control and His judgment.

Guess what? You would do it differently. So would I. You and I would rule the earth differently than God. We would, when injustice happens to us, execute it in a way that we think is right.

When injustice happens to my kids, it doesn't matter how good or bad that injustice is; it's done—you're done. We would execute that. But our King sits on the throne and executes justice that is good for everyone, the unjust and just alike, because He is the God who formed and fashioned each person in the womb. He is the God who desires all human beings to be saved.

So it is okay to recognize you would do it differently, the way this justice is dispensed.

But when you enter into the sanctuary, you are reminded that's not your role or control. You have to yield that. This is why when I pray, I use the acronym PRAY—Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield.

People say, "What is yielding, Greg?" You know what it is? Yielding is saying, "This isn't my control. God, I would definitely do it differently, but I don't have control over that, so I'm going to yield that to You. You have control over that. That's Your role, not mine. I'm going to let it go."

Honestly, yielding is the hardest part for a control freak like me. It's really hard because I want to sit there and say, "God, seriously, trust me, I know a little bit better than You on this one. Do it this way."

So we yield to God and let Him have that, and we're reminded that when we enter into the sanctuary and understand that He is the sovereign Lord, the King over all, He is the one in control and the one who dispenses justice for the good of all.

Then we can yield to Him, trust Him, and know that justice isn't always instant but it is inevitable with God.

That's important because it gives me peace that when there is injustice in our world, I know God will inevitably deal with it. He will right all the wrongs. I just have to wait, trust, and be okay because I do know who my God is.

Our God is the God who is always just and does the unthinkable to bring about His righteousness.

How do we know that? Look at the cross of Christ. Look at the empty tomb.

There's not a person in this room who would have chosen that way to bring about righteousness and peace between God and man. But God did it because He knew it would be best for generations upon generations of humankind to ever have breath, and He had that plan from the very beginning.

It's not always instant, but it is inevitable, and that brings me at least a measure of peace.

At least a measure of peace because we know justice will roll like a river.

Man, when a river flows—like when a river flows—you just know it's always moving. Even when it doesn't look like it's moving, it's moving.

Even when there's a surface and we see what's happening on the surface, if you know anything about a river, underneath there all sorts of stuff is happening—the currents are moving, things are moving.

You just see whole different things that are never happening up on the top.

That's what will happen: justice will roll like the river.

Amos says this in Amos 5:24, "Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream."

One thing I like to think about is that we often want to say it just rolls like a river, but don't forget there are small acts of justice always happening that build to great justice being triumphant.

I think of the Missouri River here in the Midwest. The Missouri River starts as a small stream in the Rocky Mountains in Montana. A small stream slowly begins to flow; then little tributaries feed into it; then you get to Omaha and it's a giant river—the largest river in North America.

You see little bits, and God's justice is like that. It's continually rolling.

Even when you're going, "That's not a lot of justice, just a little bit," remember it's flowing, gathering, gaining till the final triumphant day when Christ returns and all injustice will be wiped away.

God's justice doesn't skip us; it's just on His schedule.

It doesn't skip us.

It's just on His time, and when we have the perspective that He is the King and always does good for His people, you are Kingdom people, then we can look and say it's going to be on His schedule, when it's right.

So in Macomb, as this young man was tragically killed, there was wrestling within the community: why didn't anyone stop this? How could this continue to be allowed?

The farmers kept saying, "It might be 2016, but we're still a small farming community; we don't want streetlights lighting up and diminishing all the stars we see in the sky. This is a small hometown farming community. We don't need big city lights."

Politicians said, "Yeah, we'd think streetlights would help; we know they are necessary, but you don't understand, we have other priorities. Our budget is limited. We are choosing other policies over these things right now."

They're looking at it and asking, "What's happening?"

Even though it feels like God didn't stop it; God didn't intervene.

He didn't have the thought in the kid's head to rush aside or the driver to swerve at the last minute.

But what God did was galvanize a community to really look inward and say, "Are we thinking of our neighbor, or are we thinking of ourselves? Do we have a role in the injustice that has happened? The atrocity, the sadness, the hurt? Sorry, what part have we played?"

Justice in that moment didn't come by avoiding the disaster but came in the love and action of the town that began to say, "Maybe we want nostalgia for being a small farm community, but it's 2016, and we now have 200,000 people living here. We're not a farming community."

Maybe it was the politicians looking and saying, "All the policies, programming, parks are great, but if kids are being killed in streets with no sidewalks or lights, what good are empty parks?"

They began to say, "How do we solve this together?"

I think for you and me, we look as Christians and ask, "How are we working to solve the injustice happening around us or even to us, especially through us?"

That's where you and I get to say we are called to live it out.

That means we get to bring justice into the world.

Micah talks about this in Micah 6:8 when he says, "He has shown you, oh mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly."

The three things we do in the face of injustice are act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

These are the three things you're called to do as Christians in the face of all injustice, even your own.

There's a middle school student here in Omaha who was new to the school. Middle school can be one of the most unjust places in the world.

A group of kids decided they didn't like this new student.

What they did to her was freeze her out.

They wanted her to know she wasn't welcome.

They wouldn't talk to her in the hallways or at lunch.

When she sat down for lunch, the other kids would grab their lunch and move to a different table.

She sat by herself in a time and age where kids are developing and discovering their self-worth.

She was told she was worthless by her peers.

At night, tears streamed down her face with questions of "Why? I don't understand. Where are you, God?"

In the morning, the trepidation and anxiety of "Mom and Dad, do I have to keep going? Do I have to go back?"

"You are as bad as the torturers by sending me," she said, "like the kids who abandoned me."

Until one day, one girl said, "Enough."

Not with her words, not by standing up to the bullies, but simply when the kids left, she grabbed her lunch and sat down next to her.

From then on, she said, "You're not alone. I'm with you."

She brought justice to this girl by herself with an action louder than any word could be.

She said, "I see you, and I'm with you."

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote about this in his Birmingham Letters as he sat in prison, arrested due to racial oppression happening in a so-called free country.

He said there will be a day when this nation repents and says sorry for the way people were treated based on the color of their skin.

On that day, good men who sat silently and allowed injustice will say, "I'm sorry. I'll never be silent again."

Or in World War II in Nazi Germany, the small Christian church near train tracks would hear trains and realize that on them were Jewish men, women, and children being taken to concentration camps.

That small Christian church, in the power of Jesus' name, would drown out the atrocities by singing a hymn louder when they heard the train go by.

God calls us to act justly, to speak up when we see injustice, whether great or small.

To do something, to be His agents of justice through love and care.

Then we love mercy, which means we forgive.

As we act justly, we love mercy, which means we forgive even when wronged.

It's easy to look around and say everyone else has been wronged, but when we're wronged, it hurts even harder.

Our hearts can become hard and refuse to forgive those who've caused unjust pain.

When we refuse to forgive, we have to remember we have brought injustice upon someone as well.

It's not a person who has not brought injustice, oppression, unkindness, or unfairness.

If we refuse to forgive, we poison our own lives and the lives of those we love most.

So we're called to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

Remember, it's in God's timeline, not our own.

Our God will bring justice about, so we trust that it will happen.

We don't wait for justice to show up; we bring it.

We bring it by doing these three things, trusting that justice will roar.

How do you know justice will roar?

Look back as we celebrated Easter.

We have a God who was unjustly punished, beaten, arrested, tried, and put to death on a cross.

You have a God who carried unjust sins for you and me, who has scars that were not because of anything He did but everything we did.

He judges and wages war with His justice, and you know He rights wrongs because the tomb is empty.

The victory is won.

The grave has pronounced that justice will prevail today, tomorrow, and forever for you and me.

His light will shine bright through us.

I want to invite you to stand up to injustice, to be people who see injustice—whether large or small—and say we will act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly, trusting that God will come and right all wrongs.

Join us so there are no more scars of injustice, only the scars of Christ for you and me.

At all campuses right now, I want to invite you to stand, and we will have a prayer moment.

I'm going to invite you to privately pray how God can use you this week to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly; that when you see injustice, do one of those things and pray against it.

Whether that's global, in our world, or in your life and home, privately let us pray.

Lord God, we come before You and pray against all injustice.

We ask that You help us be people who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

Be a bright light through us.

We remember Your justice will prevail over all sin, death, and the devil.

Right now, we privately pray these things to You, O God.

May Your light shine before us and through us because we know the darkness of injustice is done.

For Christ, You have won.

All God's people said, Amen.