

The Christian's Warfare Part 10: A Biblical Perspective on Justice Part 3

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The Christian's Warfare

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6; Matthew 5:1-20

Preached on: Sunday, October 25, 2020

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Please turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Matthew 5. We're continuing a series of messages we began a number of weeks ago and we have been reading each week as a starting point from 2 Corinthians 10:1-6. We're not going to do that this morning because I've got a lot of Scripture I want to read from Matthew 5, but our subject to the title of these messages has been "The Christian's Warfare," modern Christian warfare, and we've talked about spiritual warfare in this series is basically fought in the battle place of the mind, the battlefield of the mind is where we fight. That's what we see in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 which has been that jumping point for each passage, that our weapons are not carnal but are divinely powerful to the pulling down of strongholds and those strongholds are correcting our thinking as you look at that in context. We tear down reasonings that are exalted up against the knowledge of God.

So we've been looking at modern issues as we experience them particularly in the 21st century here in America, and how we can think biblically about these things so that we can really deal with structural foundational concepts that will help us tear down those wrong ways of thinking because we're surrounded by a world that is continually bombarding us with lies. This world still lies in the power of the evil one according to 1 John 5, and the evil one is a deceiver, he's a liar from the beginning, and so the world surrounds us with lies and then we come into this world as sinners who are all too happy to believe lies because of our own resistance to God that is there from our mother's womb. And so we cooperate with those lies and we formulate beliefs, thought structures, then after we come to faith in Christ with a new heart, these ungodly thought structures still exert influence over us. Remember the image in 2 Corinthians 10 is like castles that control a whole area of territory in warfare, a castle, a garrisoned castle would be able to control a whole area because the soldiers could retreat to the castle and then when enemy armies tried to advance, they could go out of the castle, attack, retreat to the safety of the castle, and so they could stop any enemy penetration coming into that land. And Paul uses that imagery in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 to say, "I have come as an apostle to tear down the castles that are keeping you captive." Unbiblical ways of thinking, and by the power of God and the Spirit of God and the word of God, we're to tear these things down, and these are deep, structural, foundational ways of thinking.

I shared one week that John MacArthur in talking about this same passage, I heard him preach on this one time and he said that the word for "castle" could also be translated in certain context, the Greek word translated there as, let's see, "fortresses," could be translated also as "prisons," and then another context it's translated as "tombs," and so there's a sense in which the castle becomes your prison becomes your tomb, and so it's of the highest order of importance to deal with that.

So we've been looking at a lot of modern issues, particularly the issues around what we're seeing in 2020, disagreements over the coronavirus and also the challenges around our culture and the issues of race and justice, and so we've tried to look at biblical foundational concepts throughout that process. We began looking at the root issue of pride. We spent a week on following that looking at prejudice, the tendency to prejudice. We looked at the preoccupation with this world and the things of this world. Then we started looking at God's perspective or a biblical perspective on authority and then a biblical perspective on power. Then for the last two Sundays and including today it will be three weeks where we've looked at and we're looking this morning at a biblical perspective on justice. A biblical perspective on justice. So that's the subtitle of the message this morning and really the theme of the message is, again, "A Biblical Perspective on Justice." Justice is a word which is very much in the common dialogue of the day. It's something that we hear almost daily the concerns for that and about that, and so we want to talk about that this morning.

Again, I mentioned to you in previous messages that the Bible has a lot to say about justice, that when you look at the words related to justice in the Scripture, you've got the words justice, judge, judgment, just, righteous, righteousness, that those, that group of words which are very closely related in Greek and in Hebrew, they occur about 1,500 times in Scripture. So these are concepts the Bible has a lot to say about and we in previous weeks, the first week on justice, we shared, I'm just going to remind you to help us kind of set context, I'm not going to talk, elaborate on them but just remind you of the main points. The first week we said God alone defines justice. God himself embodies justice. God calls every human being to image justice, to reflect his justice, that is. Then last week we saw that to really understand justice, we have to see that God sees justice as an individual responsibility. It's an individual issue and we are all responsible to behave according to justice or righteousness. Remember we're using those words almost synonymously. They are in Scripture justice, righteousness. So it's an individual responsibility.

The second point last week was but we have to acknowledge our personal inability, that we're unable to be just, we're unable to be righteous. "There is none righteous, no, not one." And then we saw that we ended last week with justice is an internal reality; that God brings his justice and his righteousness and he brings it into the very center and soul of a man's being and transforms us from the inside out. We saw that you can't change man from the outside in. This is where we tend to be about 180 degrees out of phase. We tend to think in our sinfulness and the world system and just our collective wisdom as human beings, we want to pass the buck and we tend to think that the main problem is out there. Now even if philosophically you know better, it is still a hard thing to get past.

We think about the main problem is out there. If we could just, and we, those of us who have, you know, a little more understanding will say certainly we realize the problem is also in here. But sometimes we act like really the main problem is out there. Now what the Bible says is there is a problem out there but the main problem, the fundamental problem, the problem God is most concerned about is in here. And so we're about 180 degrees. We tend to say mostly or we think mostly out there and, yes, in here but in reality it's, yes, it's out there but it's mostly in here according to God. And so he wants to transform us from the inside out.

You see this throughout the Scriptures and so, I mean, I think I'm convicted of this myself, I know you probably. We're in an election year. There's so much going on all the time in our culture, so much about politics, and so there's the temptation to weigh these things more heavily than we ought. It's not that they're not important. They are. And I was reading a quote from a pastor the other day that said your theology should guide your voting, your voting should not guide your theology and that's a good point, and I think the Bible does have a lot to say about, to give us principles about how we can think about how we can exercise our freedom in this country. In fact, I'm planning on talking about that on Wednesday night some. I want to share some, I think, biblical principles that can help us think about these things, but I want you to understand I'm doing that on Wednesday night and not on Sunday because I don't think that is about, you know, 2-3-4% of our focus and 96 or 97 or 98% of our focus should be where God puts the focus, on the heart, so that whatever happens in the election is not going to change no matter which side you're on, it should not change your mission if you belong to Jesus Christ. Your mission on November 4 or 5 or 6 or whenever we actually know the result of the election is the same as it is today. It will not change and that should be a great comfort to us and in reality the church has lived through all kinds of different circumstances from the beginning.

So the issue is let's get on God's agenda and do what he wants us to do. That's why on Sunday mornings we're focusing exclusively on this. I'm hesitant even to do that on Wednesday night but I think it's appropriate as a part of what we're doing and thinking, and I'm not going to tell you how to vote. You fill out your form and, you know... No, not at all but we'll talk about biblical principles and how they relate to this issue. But today, Sunday morning, we want to worship God and we want to hear his word and we want to set our hearts and minds as always on what he wants us to be about and clearly he is about seeing things that justice is really an issue of the heart.

So it's not mostly external, it's mostly internal. In fact, it all begins internally. That's where we ended last Sunday, but then that justice God intends when he works justice and righteousness into our hearts through the Gospel, he doesn't intend the justice to stay inside. He intends it to be lived out and this is the way he wants to spread his justice around the world, is by transforming people who will live righteous lives by grace. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone we come to know God. We're not saved by good works in any way. We're saved, as Paul says in Romans 3:28, we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works, that is, cut off from works. That is salvation. We are justified by the finished work of Jesus Christ. You are declared righteous forever

when you repent and place your faith in Jesus. That is salvation apart from works but apart from works, then unto good works.

Once you're saved, God wants you to become more and more like Jesus and you see this clearly, we're going to see this in our passage this morning, that once the heart is changed, God calls us then now to live out, to work out what he's worked in, to be exhibiting his righteousness in our lives and that's what we're called to do, and that is the most powerful thing that you and I can do to promote justice in the world, and it is not even close, that when you and I live as consecrated to God, captivated by his grace, aware that he has saved us not because of anything in ourselves but because of what his Son has done, his love has been lavished upon us and then out of the gratitude and joy of knowing we're accepted in the Beloved forever, then we just want to love God back not because we're trying to earn anything but just because we want to express our love, and that we live a life of worship and adoration to him and we want our lives to conform to his Son, and we by his grace, trusting in the power of the Spirit and the word and the indwelling Christ, we want to live lives of righteousness. That is, then, how the world sees justice. To see justice is to see the character of God on display, to see righteousness, and they see that through his people. That's the beauty of his plan.

We see this in Matthew 5. We're going to read verses 1 to 20 of Matthew 5. The Sermon on the Mount, the first 20 verses of the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to talk about some of the verses after that.

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 13 You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. 17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass

away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word. We come as always to Your word in need of grace, Lord, in need of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to illumine Your word, to make it alive in our hearts, to open our eyes that we might see wonderful things from Your law, to open our eyes that we might see Christ, that we might love Him more truly and serve Him more faithfully. We pray this in His name and for His glory. Amen.

So a biblical perspective on justice and what I want to do is briefly touch on a couple of preliminary observations and then we're going to get into, so there's two preliminary observations and then there's two points to the sermon. So two things we're going to talk about first and then two main points, okay? So the first preliminary observation is the absence of justice. This is just something we have to remind ourselves again about the absence of justice. This is something that Scripture makes so very clear, that in a fallen world there is no justice. It's completely absent.

Look with me at Psalm 14 for a moment, Psalm 14:1-3. These are verses that Paul picks up and quotes in Romans 3. "The fool has said in his heart," Psalm 14:1, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one." The picture is vivid. God is looking down upon the earth to see if there's anybody that does good, anyone who does justice and righteousness. Is there any? And the answer is no. There's none.

Interesting, these same words are also at the beginning of another Psalm and when God says something twice, you need to really pay attention to it. Psalm 53:1-3. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God,'" almost identical, just a couple of minor changes between these two Psalms. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God,' They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; There is no one who does good. God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one." You see, the Lord puts that in the Psalter twice for us and so that's why Paul quotes it in Romans 3.

We see this, this absence of justice just throughout the Old Testament. One of the books that really emphasizes the issue of justice and righteousness is the book of the prophet

Isaiah. When you look at the words "justice" and "righteousness" themselves, about 1/6 of all the occurrences in the Bible occur in the book of Isaiah. One book out of 66 has 1/6 of all the occurrences of those two words "justice" and "righteousness," and Isaiah starts off lamenting the fact that there is no justice and he's talking about among the people of God. These are the Jews who have the law, they have the sacrificial system, they have the covenants, and yet there's no justice. Verse 16 of Isaiah 1, "Wash yourselves," he says, "make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight." Here God is speaking through the prophet, "Remove the evil from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan." Down to verse 21, "How the faithful city has become a harlot, She who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, But now murderers. Your silver has become dross, Your drink diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels And companions of thieves; Everyone loves a bribe And chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, Nor does the widow's plea come before them."

Turn over to chapter 59 of Isaiah or listen to these words. Here again some verses that Paul draws on in Romans 3 when he shows the sinfulness of fallen man, the depravity of man. Isaiah 59:7 says, "Their feet run to evil, And they hasten to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, Devastation and destruction are in their highways. They do not know the way of peace, And there is no justice in their tracks; They have made their paths crooked, Whoever treads on them does not know peace. Therefore justice is far from us, And righteousness does not overtake us; We hope for light, but behold, darkness, For brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope along the wall like blind men, We grope like those who have no eyes; We stumble at midday as in the twilight, Among those who are vigorous we are like dead men." Do you see the imagery? We're looking for justice which is light, righteousness is light and we're in the dark. We're groping along in the dark. We can't see our way. This is the state of the people of God in the Old Testament so this is certainly the state of all humanity. The good news is, though, the Lord as we read on down, verse 12, "For our transgressions are multiplied before You, And our sins testify against us; For our transgressions are with us, And we know our iniquities: Transgressing and denying the LORD, And turning away from our God, Speaking oppression and revolt, Conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words. Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands far away; For truth has stumbled in the street, And uprightness cannot enter." Do you see how hopeless this is?

Look what happens, "Yes, truth is lacking; And he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Now the LORD saw, And it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice. And He saw that there was no man, And was astonished that there was no one to intercede," and here's the turning point, "Then His own arm brought salvation to Him, And His righteousness upheld Him." We looked at this when we were looking at the Ephesian series on spiritual warfare. "He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing." He's saying God looked at the injustice and it displeased him. There was no one doing justice. So what did he do? He came down to bring justice, to do justice. The Lord Jesus Christ, this is him wearing the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation.

And so that's what we see that the preliminary first thing, the absence of justice, and so we expect because we are sinners that even when we do things that appear to be good, they're still tainted with evil, there's elements of injustice in everything that we do in and of ourselves. But the absence of justice, that's the first preliminary observation. The second thing, preliminary observation is the longing for justice. We see the hope, it turns there that God's going to do something. He's going to send someone. He's going to come himself and put on the breastplate of righteousness and he's going to fight for justice, and we see this throughout the book of Isaiah. In fact, I'll mention a couple of things.

Well, just go ahead and turn back to Isaiah 11 and I'll mention later to look at Isaiah 2, 3 and 4. That's where it says they will be, there's a day coming when they will beat their plowshares, I mean they will beat their spears into plowshares and their swords into pruning hooks. That's actually, that verse, Isaiah 2:4, is inscribed on the wall across the street from the United Nations building, and it goes on to say, and they will not, nation will not rise against nation, neither will they make war anymore. That's Isaiah 2:4. There's a day, there's a longing in the heart and God says there's a day coming like that and, of course, the United Nations as they were building that building, that wall was dedicated to say that's what they're hoping to accomplish but there's no way the United Nations, they have not done well in that. Biblically we knew that it was impossible. Only King Jesus can bring peace.

But you see in Isaiah 11 the beauty of it and this is what we need to understand. It is a good thing that people want justice. It is a good thing that human beings care about justice and oppression and we acknowledge it is a reality. Injustice is a reality. Racism is a reality. Bigotry is a reality. These are evils that God hates and we ought to hate as Christians and the best of human beings, even though they're sinners, the image of God in them, still by common grace they resonate. That's why they put those verses on that wall. They want that day when there will be no more war. In 1948 they built right after World War II, three years after World War II they put that there. The atomic age had begun. It was a hope.

But look at the beauty of the justice that God is going to bring. Isaiah 11. He's going to bring it through his Son. Isaiah 11:1, "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit." This is the son of Jesse, the son of David. Jesse is David's father. A branch is going to come from Jesse. "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." The Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus. The fullness of the Spirit. This is the fulfillment of these verses. "And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist." And look at this, the picture of what Jesus is going to bring. "And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the

young lion and the fatling together." Think about that. The wolf is going to lie down with the lamb. The leopard and a young goat just lying down, kind of snuggling together.

You know, we've had throughout the years, we've usually had two dogs, right now we just have one, but one of the things is interesting to see how they will, they're pack animals, they hang out together and my two dogs, the one died a year ago, but before that they got where they would fight a lot. I mean, crazy fighting. I never had this with the other dogs in the past that I owned myself but they just really got on, if things were in certain circumstances, they would just go at each other. What was amazing, though, is just the next day you'd see them over there laying down together, just, you know, it's cold, there they are right together and I just had to separate them yesterday because of a fight, now they're doing that.

Well anyway, that's a little bit of a picture of it, I guess, but what this is saying, something more, way more profound than that, an animal that should be devouring another animal is lying down with an animal. This is harmony. All the effects of sin have been reversed. What beauty that is. There is no more war because there's no more conflict in creation at all. He says the cow and the bear will graze. The young will lie down, their young will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra. The nursing child can sit there and put his hand in the cobra's hole and the cobra won't strike. "They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea." I would say to you that if you read that passage of Scripture to even the most hardened unbeliever, something that is still in their heart because of the image of God, it will strike a chord. There's something in humanity we know that's how it's supposed to be.

So there is this longing for justice and that justice is going to come through the one we read about at the beginning of that chapter in Isaiah 11, the shoot that will spring from the stem of Jesse, the Lord Jesus, who's talked about in Isaiah 9 when it says, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, the government will rest on His shoulders, His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." The message of Isaiah is the world is a mess but God is going to do something about it. God is going to bring his justice. He's going to send a son of David. He's going to send a king.

And so we see in the Bible, then, is that righteousness and justice are uniquely a part of the kingdom of God so that the phrase "the kingdom of God" is an important biblical concept that the kingdom of God is simply a shorthand way of saying the reign of God. The kingdom of God is present when God's reign is acknowledged. When God's authority is completely submitted to, you will have perfect peace. You will have the lion lying down with the ox, the wolf and the lamb. There will be complete harmony and a day is coming when the kingdom of God comes, that's when justice is coming, and so there's this expectation. These words were written 700 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah,

and all the prophets saying justice is coming. God is going to send his righteousness, his justice. Look for the kingdom.

Well, that sets up for us then now into the remaining outline of the sermon today the two points. The first point this morning is the arrival of justice. The arrival of justice that we see in the very first pages of the New Testament. The arrival of justice is seen in the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. And listen, the Jews when they heard these words, when they heard as you see in actually if you turn a page back over, we're back in Matthew 5, if you turn back over to Matthew 3, John the Baptist goes preaching and what is his message? What is the essence of his preaching? It's given to us in verse 2. You can sum up his preaching message as, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has arrived. That's really what the force of what it means. The kingdom of heaven is near, it's at hand. It's near, it's at hand, it's here. That's what he's saying. The kingdom of heaven has now arrived and in the arrival of the kingdom of heaven is the arrival of justice. The arrival of the kingdom of heaven is the arrival of righteousness. This is what we've been waiting for. All of the injustice is going to be dealt with. The King is here.

John preaches that, that's what he preaches everywhere he goes, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then we're told in chapter 4 in verse 12, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee." He goes to Capernaum and settles in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, those are two of the tribes of Israel. And then Matthew tells us, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet," chapter 9, verses 1 to 6, that we read from part of this earlier, these two verses, but this was to fulfill, was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light has dawned." This was what was prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 9 where he says his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor. Those walking in darkness will see a great light.

The King is here and then what it says, and John was arrested. His ministry has ended. Jesus now realizes it's time for his ministry to begin. He goes to Capernaum, it fulfills Isaiah 9:1-2 and verse 17, look what it says in verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" The essence of his preaching was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom has arrived. The kingdom of God means the righteousness of God has arrived, the justice of God has arrived. All of the darkness, all of the despair is about to be lifted because the King has come. When he sends his disciples out preaching in Matthew 10:7, he tells them, "This is your message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

So the essential message of the New Testament is that in the coming of the Messiah, the King has come, now the kingdom of God, the reign of God is being made known in this world and that's what needs to happen. To feel something of the weight of this, imagine you lived in France in 1944 or Holland, and you were under the darkness and tyranny of Nazi Germany and you had been so for more than four years. German tanks rolled into

France in May of 1940 and in June of 1944 it was completely occupied, the Nazis were in control. No freedom. No hope. Injustice all around. Evil reigning. And imagine you heard, I don't know how you would have heard, maybe shortwave radio because the radio stations were taken care of, the Nazis controlled everything, but you get word that American soldiers, British soldiers have parachuted in, there's word that they're landing on the beaches at Normandy, that they established a beachhead, the Allies are coming, we're about to be delivered, justice and freedom and righteousness are coming, imagine how your heart would leap and now multiply that by about a billion and that's the reality of what we're talking about in Matthew 4, Matthew 5. When John says the kingdom of heaven is at hand, he's preaching that in Matthew 3, it's that kind of announcement. "I'm telling you, they're storming the beaches. God has arrived." Matthew 4, Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Another preacher, the same message, "They're storming the beaches. God has arrived. Justice has come." He then begins to tell us in Matthew 5 what the arrival of justice looks like and it looks differently than we expected but when you see it correctly, it's much more glorious and beautiful than we expected or could even imagine, but the arrival of justice comes in the person of Jesus. Justice arrives in a person. When John said the kingdom of heaven is at hand, he was saying it because Jesus is present. The King has come. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. God's anointed King that he's installed and placed on his holy mountain, Psalm 2, is now here. And when Jesus preaches it, he's saying, "I'm here."

So that's the arrival, you could say the arrival of justice, maybe in two points you could say in a person, subpoint A. The arrival of Jesus in a person, that's what we just talked about, Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17 and following, but what we see, the second subpoint under the arrival of justice, not just in a person, 1B would be the arrival of justice in the heart. That's the point of the Beatitudes. Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount and he basically lays out what his kingdom is. "This is what it means to be a part of My kingdom. This is what it means to be under My reign and rule. This is what it means to be brought into the realm of justice and righteousness." And we're going to see like we saw last week, it starts as in internal reality. That's the point of Matthew 5:3-12, the Beatitudes.

"He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'" Each one of these Beatitudes, they all come together and describe a person who has been born again by the power of grace. To be saved, you have to have God open the eyes of your heart so that you see, first of all, your poverty before God, that you are impoverished before the Lord, that you have nothing, no righteousness. We see our righteousness, even our righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of a holy God. We have no standing before God. There's nothing to commend ourselves to him. When you come to understand that you have absolutely utterly nothing to commend yourself to God, Jesus says in that moment, in that realization, in a sense, initially horrible realization that you have nothing, he says, "Oh, how happy are you." That's the beginning. Blessed are, oh how happy are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven has come to them. In fact, he ends the Beatitudes, he brackets them with two Beatitudes

that both end with "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verse 3, Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The eighth Beatitude, verse 10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is the bracketing, this is what it looks like to be a citizen of the kingdom. You see your poverty and in your poverty you see your poverty and you mourn over your poverty, you mourn over your spiritual filthiness before God. "Blessed are those who mourn. Oh, how happy are you when you mourn, when your heart is broken over sin."

What a sweet place that is and it goes on, "Blessed are the meek." When you become impoverished spiritually, you know you have no standing, you mourn over your sin, how can you hold onto any of your rights? Meekness is releasing rights. Christians are those who are people who are meek. We're not to walk around looking to be offended. That is the opposite of love, the opposite of what it means to be a Christian. Love hardly notices when others take it and do it wrong, 1 Corinthians 13. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The meek are people who are not concerned with their rights, with their reputation, they're concerned about Jesus' reputation, and out of love and gratitude for what Jesus has done to them, they're then able to serve others around them and the irony is when you're meek, I love this, the wisdom of God, when you're meek, it essentially means you stop holding onto whatever it is you want. If you want respect, you want your husband to love you, you want your children to, you know, follow God, and these can be good things, right? I mean, all those are actually fine. You want your husband to love you, as a wife you should want that. Men, you should want your wife to respect you, your children, that's a good thing. You should want your children to follow God. Yes, yes, yes, all of those things are good but they're not to become more important to us than trusting and serving God because these things belong to him.

So if I hold onto whatever I hold onto like this, the Bible says if you love your life, you lose it. You end up squeezing out, like if I was trying to hold something, this was something valuable, not a water bottle, and I'm not going to squeeze this, for sure. We've been told not to do that, right? But if I squeeze this too hard, if it's something precious, you can squeeze it and hold onto it so much that you end up either breaking it and losing it, or your hand, it squirts out of your hand, God takes it away. "The one who loves his life loses it but the one who loses his life for My sake finds it." When you lay it down or I like to use this image, instead of holding it like this, I want respect, I want love, I want my children to follow God, you say, "Lord, I would really love for my wife to respect me. I would love for my husband to love me. I'd love for my children to follow You. I want that so much but I'm going to hold it with an open hand. It's completely up to You." And when you open your hand, he says, "Blessed are the meek," what? They're the people that aren't holding onto things but what happens to them? They get everything. You not only get what you might have been tempted to hold onto, he says you inherit the earth. This is the way of God and so when we lay down our rights, we find in our freedom we have everything in Christ.

So this is a picture of salvation. It goes on, you hunger and thirst for righteousness. We want to be holy and righteous, we want to be like Jesus, we want to have righteousness

initially in salvation but we also want to grow in righteousness and we become merciful because we've received mercy. We become more and more pure in heart, more and more single-minded and wanting to see God. And then we become peacemakers. And then we will in some ways be persecuted. This is the character sketch.

So this is when justice has arrived in the heart, that's what it looks like. That's the arrival of justice. The second point this morning is the advancement of justice. The advancement of justice and that's basically verses 13 to 16 and really all the way through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Verses 13 to 16, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." He says, "When I take a person and I give them a new heart and I make them like this, poor in spirit, mourning over sin, meek and gentle, hungry and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, growing in character like this, then that person becomes like salt on the earth to stop decay, light in the world to drive back darkness." That person from the inside out begins to manifest character that has a decisive influence on this decaying and dark world. This is God's way. This is God's plan.

And he says that what happens is how do you let your light shine before men? You do good works. Remember we're not saved by good works but we're saved unto good works. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven, that is that the change that's happened in us we now want to live out and in doing good works which means to do good to others for the glory of God, as we actively do things for the glory of God and the benefit of others, light is shining and justice is being made known. It's being unveiled. And this is what I think is behind the rest of the chapter. I mean, verses 17 to 20, he basically says, "Listen, I know you're going to think," and I love this and it's essentially like Paul does in Romans 6:1, "If you understand what I'm preaching," Paul says in Romans 6:1, "some are saying that because I said where sin abounds grace much more abounds, some are saying that I don't believe that you should be holy. What shall we say then?" Romans 6:1, "Shall we sin that grace may abound? If we're saved by grace, can't we just keep on sinning?" That's what people were accusing Paul of saying. I think Jesus is doing something similar right here in Matthew 5:17-20. He's saying, "Some of you as you're listening to what I'm saying, you're going to think that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets, that I don't want My people to be obedient, but you're missing the point. No, I haven't come to abolish the law and the prophets, I have come to fulfill it. I'm going to fulfill it in myself and my people who are saved by grace. Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We'll now have transformed lives increasingly over time, little by little, grace will work in them and they will become more and more like Me and their good works will testify of their salvation and their righteousness."

He ends it up by saying, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He's essentially

saying that, this is an astounding statement. It's hard for us to feel the force of it because if you've been around the church for any length of time, you know that the Pharisees are the bad guys, right? The scribes and the Pharisees are the bad guys. It's clear in your New Testament the scribes and the Pharisees are the bad guys. They're the self-righteous, self-important enemies of Christ. But when Jesus said this, when he preached this for the first time, this was like a bombshell going off. This was totally blowing up the way they saw things. The scribes and the Pharisees, the scribes were the people who, they were the legal experts, really the theological experts of the day. They were constantly studying the law, teaching the law, copying the law. The Pharisees, they were the most, people thought the most spiritually minded people in all of Israel. To be a Pharisee, the word itself means "separate." It's related, it's not the exact same word but it's related to the concept of holiness, separate and distinct from the world. So the Pharisees and the scribes, they looked like the most righteous people and when Jesus says your righteousness must exceed their righteousness, the people who heard that thought that's impossible. "That's impossible for me." But Jesus is going to show now, "No, it's actually true," and it's going to be true of every one of his people who are truly saved. Their practical, daily, experiential righteousness will exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Now you're saved by grace, you're saved when God transfers, credits Jesus' righteousness to you on the basis of what Christ did, but once you're saved, he's saying, "Now that you're saved, I've given you a new heart and there's now a disposition that wants to move away from sin. Yeah, you still have an old man, you still have to work at this, it's a struggle day by day, but over time you're going to be growing little by little, sometimes three steps forward, two steps back, but you're going to be growing in righteousness." And then what he does from verses 21 to 48 is he takes six different statements and he basically says this, "You've heard it said, but I say to you," and he contrasts the scribes and Pharisees' ways of teaching about the law and he says essentially, what he's getting at with each one and I encourage you to look at them this week, each one he's basically saying, "Listen, God changes people from the heart. The scribes, yeah, they don't murder anybody outwardly but they're filled with anger and rage and they look down upon people. They don't love people and so they really are guilty of murder. The scribes and the Pharisees, they are meticulous about not committing physical adultery but I say to you that if you look in their hearts you'll see their hearts are filled with adultery. They look lustfully at women. They are filled with impure desires." And we know what it is as even people saved by grace to struggle with sinful anger and sinful lust, but the person who's been saved from the inside of the heart can begin to be changed and that's what he's getting at here.

He says, "My people are going to be people who don't just worry about the outside, they're going to be cleaned out from the inside." So that we are to be people who mourn over, we're to be people who mourn over the fact that we got mad and called someone a fool. Not that we didn't commit murder. It isn't like, "You should be happy I didn't kill you." Right? I mean, we'd never say that but that's how we can think. But in reality the very fact that that evil is there, the Christian mourns over that, that evil in my heart that would cause me to think the thoughts that I almost even said, and we run to Christ, "Lord Jesus, be my righteousness. Help me be like You. Help me be meek so that when

somebody gets in my way, I'm not thinking about my way anymore, I'm thinking about Your way and I'm laying down every right I have so that I can be kind all the time by Your power and Your grace. And Lord Jesus, help me not lust after sexual pleasure or lust after the pleasures of this world but help me long for heaven and help me love others and not steal affection from other people but let me bless and encourage and strengthen all the way down through all of these, and let me not be someone who hates my enemies." How powerful this is and especially today when there's so much hostility in our culture. Everyone, the battle lines are being drawn, the camps are being formed in almost every issue you think about.

I mean, think about it. It's true about even the coronavirus. If you're for this particular view or this particular view, everybody's becoming more and more in their own camps, separated. So we can see people as enemies and Jesus says, "Listen, if somebody really is your enemy, if they really are coming at you with hatred, what are you supposed to do? Love them. Don't hate them, so that you can be like your Father who's in heaven. Pray for them." We're to be people who when we find in our hearts anger at something that some politician says or something that someone does and we find in our hearts anger and rage, we must mourn over that and ask us for love for that person. It doesn't mean we wouldn't speak the truth to them. We can tell them, "Hey, you're wrong. What you're doing is evil. What you're advocating is evil." But it would come from a heart that says, "I want you to know that because you need Jesus Christ and I want you to be in heaven with me."

That's how we should see people and the Christians are people who are supposed to be helping one another remember these things. That's hard to remember that isn't it? Isn't it easy to especially in our culture just to sit around and think about all the things that are wrong and to get agitated and upset about these things? And what we should be doing is praying for those people, asking for their salvation, asking God for the opportunities to be around people like that that we can then show his love to, and that they can then see his righteousness and justice. And what this means is his righteousness and justice become visible in his people. This is what he's called us to. People see you returning good for evil, they see God visibly and we're called to make the invisible God visible. We're called to make his righteousness and justice that starts in the heart, that is an internal reality, we're called to make it visible by his grace, and when we begin to do that, more effectively we are powerful salt to stop decay and we are lights set on a hill.

I love the image. Like, you don't light a lamp and put it under a peck measure or a basket. It's hard for us to think about that because when we light a light, we just do this, click, right? And you have to think about that really you have to think about what it's like when the power's off. When we have a power outage and there's no light. And you know when you have a power outage and, you know, you've got no moonlight even, you remember some of these nights, some of you are old enough to remember some nights, I've had some nights where I could not see my hand in front of my face. I didn't know where I was going. There was one time I was walking into a wall, I thought I was at the door and I was way over here in my bedroom years ago. Couldn't see anything and the longer it went, the farther I got away from the door. Finally Patti rescued me. But if you're in that kind of darkness and you light a lamp, you light a candle, you don't take the candle that

you lit and cover it up. You take the candle and you lift it up so that it'll give light to everything. He's saying that's how you and I are to live. We're to see God has lit a light in us and he wants us to put it on a lampstand, that is our business each day is to let our light shine by doing good works for the glory of God and the good of others. And this we can do every single day no matter what happens in our nation, no matter what happens in your life. You can be doing that every day until Jesus comes for you and if we do that, we will make a difference and he will be glorified.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for the Gospel. We thank You for the blessing of being Your children. We pray that You would help us to walk in holiness. Lord, we know that there's no good in us, that to have been born again, it's only the work that You have done and we have to continue to put to death the deeds of the body on a daily basis. We have to die daily to our flesh and our evil sinful desires through the power of the cross and the resurrection. But help us be about that. Help us not be complacent. Help us to be fervent in our desire for holiness. Help us to press on with all the energy that You give us, Lord, to be like Jesus, and help us to make this world to begin to see righteousness and justice as You, as it exists in Your holy character, beautiful and perfect. Help us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.