



Justice AND THE PROPHETS

The Silent Moment

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

— Micah 6:8



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Justice and the Prophets

During Solomon’s reign, cultural and religious influences began to erode the spiritual and moral fabric of Israel. After Solomon died the nation divided. In rebellion, the political and religious leaders in the northern kingdom led the people away from God and justice. The southern kingdom initially maintained integrity, but eventually also separated from God and justice, even after some intermittent periods of revival that the people did not sustain.

God showed mercy by calling individuals to become prophets. They knew God, studied the Scriptures, and prayed and listened to God. He sent them to speak to the rulers and people in both kingdoms about their sin and to lead the people back to righteousness and justice. The people did not receive God’s mercy to listen and change, but this does not make the prophets God sent any less significant. The test of a prophet is outcome—a prophet’s words are always fulfilled because they are God’s words.

God called ordinary people to become prophets. Isaiah, for example, was a family man living in Jerusalem with a wife and at least two sons (Isaiah 7:3; 8:3). God also called some priests in the Old Testament. For example, God changed Ezekiel’s career path as a priest (Ezekiel 1:3) to become a prophet to speak God’s messages to the rebellious people (2:7). Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest, but even while Jeremiah was still in the womb, God set him apart and appointed him to be “a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

True prophets always have been people who seek God, listen to Him, and obey. They are people who study Scripture, pray, and spend time with God. Because of these dominant characteristics, prophets do not make their own messages. God gives their message and tells them how to communicate it. This is why it was no problem when Jeremiah argued that he didn’t know how to speak

and that he wasn't ready (Jeremiah 1:6). God always equips His prophets.

The Old Testament prophets lived in, and spoke into, periods of national and international upheaval—times that are somewhat like ours. These are times when justice is not always well known, not always applied, often challenged, and desperately needed. Like it was with prophets in the Old Testament times, believers who try to share God's message today may not be appreciated or well liked. But such people also know that God is the source of their message and that when they follow Him, they show God's mercy to the world. They have the assurance that when they study well, devote time to be with God, pray, and listen, then God directs the words and the actions that will bring justice into a world in upheaval.

May this series of daily devotionals be a resource for your time with God each day. May they help you know God's message for justice in the world. And when you do speak and act for justice in the world, remember that like the prophets of old, our words and actions are to be God's message. He works through His message to bring justice, salvation, and transformation that come only through the grace and mercy of the greatest of prophets—Jesus Christ, who is Priest, Prophet, and Savior.

Scott Stewart, Editor

The Heart of Our Worship

“Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them” (Amos 5:22).

Scripture: Amos 5:18-24

Song: “Psalm 51—A Broken Spirit and Contrite Heart”

“But I’ve been good all day!” she exclaimed when her request for a new phone was denied. The child’s look of disbelief that one day’s performance would not be enough quickly changed to an expression of being perplexed. And then frustration emerged as this mom told her 11-year-old that a phone required more than one day’s obedience. Her mom was encouraging a heart devoted to righteousness—the source of sustained obedience for the sake of pleasing God, not for what you can get.

Just as a parent longs for her child’s obedience to stem from more than the desire for a single object, God desires more than our ceremonious acts. The psalmist David cried out this truth: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Psalm 51:16, 17). The motivations behind our obedience and worship matter. Sincere worship and a long obedience stem from a contrite spirit and heartfelt desire to honor God.

Lord, please continue to work in my heart so my sacrifice and worship may be pleasing to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Wronged by God?

“Though I call for help, there is no justice” (Job 19:7).

Scripture: Job 19:1-7

Song: “Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending”

In 1987, former Secretary of Labor Raymond Donovan was indicted for larceny and fraud in a business relationship. The case was bitter and widely publicized. In the end a jury acquitted Donovan, and he is quoted as saying to the media: “Which office do I go to, to get my reputation back?”

All of us experience injustices: we have not received something good that we should have received, or we have received something bad that we should not have received. After five bitter exchanges between a suffering Job and his three myopic friends, Job lashed out against their injustice. He said, in effect, “You cannot put your finger on any wrongdoing on my part. If God allows you to smear my reputation on the basis of my circumstances and not on the basis of clear misconduct, then He has wronged me.” Then Job cried out in anger against the ongoing silence of God’s justice.

In our day, justice is becoming much more fluid, and injustice is becoming a formidable force. To withstand the storm surge of unresolved injustice in our day, Job’s earlier expression of faith must be ours: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15).

Sovereign, holy, and just judge of all, grant us hearts of patient faith when wrongly judged, and hearts alert against the temptation to judge beyond the boundaries Jesus set for us. In Christ, amen.

March 3

The Doctor's Smile

Let my teaching fall like rain (Deuteronomy 32:2).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:1-4

Song: “This Is My Father’s World”

The doctor smiled as he arrived to report on my mother’s CT scan; and he kept smiling as he explained the discovery of advanced, inoperable bronchial cancer—and the limited time remaining for her to be with us. That smile is etched in my memory as being out of place and out of touch; and it resurfaces when I read today’s text and the verses that follow.

Like the doctor’s smile, this final song Moses gave to Israel begins with 4 stanzas of gentle spring rains and sparkling morning dew. However, the remaining 39 stanzas pound to the beat of a drum of national unfaithfulness, relentless trauma, and divine vengeance. I can appreciate the showers and dew; but as the tone changes, it takes a moment for me to realize that the rest of the text is not about a terminal diagnosis. Verse 36 holds the key: “The LORD will vindicate his people.” That phrase underscores why a hymn writer was correct in saying: “Though the wrong is oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.”

Before we can adequately struggle with our own experiences of injustice, and before we can put down the newspaper without being discouraged or enraged, we must understand that there is a bigger story unfolding, and it is being overseen by a really big God in whose hands we can leave our heart’s cry for justice (Romans 12:19).

Father, give us grace to see Your smile in our darkness, and to know that the news behind it, even when long in coming, will be good. In Christ, amen.

Bitter Cupfuls

“I will make my words in your mouth a fire” (Jeremiah 5:14).

Scripture: Jeremiah 5:14-19

Song: “O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe”

Thankfully, the indignity of lower GI exploratory procedures is buffered by unconsciousness. The gallon of liquid solution which must be drunk beforehand is another matter. Remembering this may help us think about the full cup of iniquity that describes God's ways in judgment (Psalm 75:7, 8).

The bitter-cupful principle began in Eden. There God postponed the death sentence, and allowed the first couple to experience the folly of claiming godhood. Since then we have each taken our turn squeezing the spoiled grapes of sin for ourselves.

Before us are two cups. Mercifully, one is a medicinal cup. It is full of the life consequences of sins, and it may be filled several times. This is the cup that Jeremiah's scorching message put before Israel. It is not about justice; it is about discipline—and in Israel's case it would be served by the unjust hands of a wicked nation. Its objective was (and is) discipline and repentance (Hebrews 12:7-12). The other cup is the final one. It will be served by the just hand of our holy God on the threshold of eternity. But for many, this is an empty cup—not because they have never sinned, but because they have repented of their claim to godhood. For them Jesus drank the bitter cup on dark Calvary (Colossians 2:13, 14).

Just judge of all, thank You for an empty cup of wrath. Help me be patient when I need a medicinal cup of discipline. In Christ, amen.

March 5

Whose Mess Is This?

“Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed”
(Habakkuk 1:5).

Scripture: Habakkuk 1:5-11

Song: “Set My Soul Afire”

In the days when only one color transmitter existed, workers owned the few TV sets that could receive the color signal. Wanting to impress some friends, one worker asked a technician to broadcast something colorful. The technician chose a basket of fruit in which he placed a blue banana. The result was several moments of frustration as the television owner tried to correct the banana's color without discoloring everything else.

The screen of man's history shows a chaos of malformed, off-color relationships tumbled together in a basket full of injustice. One finds more than blue bananas in the 24-7 news feeds of modern media. Men and women, heirs of the godhood status Adam wanted, are failed deities who can't get truth right, but who continue to pretend they can. And as they continue to pretend, they continue to fill the basket with battles for turf—from living room to neighborhood to the international stage.

As followers of Christ we must not let ourselves agree with the world's false indictment of God for mismanagement. Neither must we try to stand aloof as though we had not contributed to the problem. It was, after all, our sin which brought us to Christ for salvation; and we are still a sanctified people in the process of shedding our own petty kingdoms.

God, grant us the clarity of spirit to remember it is not You—it is we, Adam's heirs, who contribute to this world's mess. Help us who have come to Christ for forgiveness to bring better fruit to the table. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Life Is More Than Plankton

By his net he lives in luxury (Habakkuk 1:16).

Scripture: Habakkuk 1:15-17

Song: “Make Me a Blessing”

Acres of coastal waters turn reddish as upwellings hoist nutrients and billions of tiny plankton to the surface. Behind them come schools of small fish; and behind those come dolphins and towers of tuna, followed by sharks and killer whales. For days the waters seethe in a massive feeding frenzy. It is a picture of the history of nations—godless people feeding on each other until the chaos calls for someone with a net to haul them in.

Habakkuk used the image of idolatrous fishermen to describe stronger man-gods filling their nets with lesser man-gods for their own enjoyment. Jesus warned His disciples against the passion of nations for banquets and high fashion (Luke 12:22-30). When asked to help a man get his rightful inheritance, He refused and added, “Beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15, *KJV*).

The temptation to be led into the world’s whirl of commercialism is not overcome by becoming a complainer of its greed-motivated injustices. Jesus tells us to seek above all else the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Luke 12:31). No matter where we are being tossed about in the feeding frenzy of nations, we need not lust for our “fair share” of the plankton. Our role is to be fishers of men for the Lord who can give them life.

Lord Jesus, empower us to seek souls for their good and Your glory. For Your glory, amen.

“Bullyhood”

When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion . . . (Isaiah 10:12).

Scripture: Isaiah 10:12-14

Song: “In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified”

It might be an all-too-familiar scene: a two-bit intimidator taunting a vulnerable newcomer at school. Matters escalate until the newcomer proves himself less vulnerable than the bully dared to hope. But there is still the possibility of the beaten bully drawing in a circle of wannabe bullies to help him even the score.

Here are two clichés worth knowing: “There is no such thing as getting even” and “The issue is control.” Of all the lusts that drive quarrels, control is at the core (James 4:1, 2). This is why history records the failure of man’s ability to manage good and evil. The result has been a world of escalating conflicts. In Scripture God shows how He uses our bent to bullying to discipline His chosen people. In today’s text, the bully of choice was Assyria. However, like all bullies, Assyria would flaunt its “bullyhood” until God let another thug (Babylon) into the ring. This process will continue until the most horrible bully of all time will have his day . . . and his destruction.

We who trust Christ should be warned that God can use even our times of disobedience to serve His purposes; but there is no reward in it. Our calling is to a life of good works done in the light of His grace. Our task is not to get even but to give the gospel.

Gracious, forgiving God, may we know the superior power of giving grace instead of getting even. In our Savior’s name, amen.

“The State Inspector Will Be Here This Week”

The wicked hem in the righteous, so that the law is perverted (Habakkuk 1:4).

Scripture: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-14

Song: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

The words of today’s title always distressed the director of our youth camp ministry. Thankfully, he and the inspector had a good working relationship, and the director learned the importance of leaving at least one thing to be “discovered.” Other directors were not so privileged. They worked with people who had an agenda beyond camper safety—an agenda that resented the camp’s existence.

People with power agendas recognize the role that rules play, and they have sought platforms from which they can bring on a misery by law (Psalm 94:20), which applies pressure by means of legal mischief. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Darius give us prime examples. Today churches and Christian ministries can be shut down for physical compliance failures. The day approaches when compliance will go beyond safety issues. That day will bring demands for a redefinition—that wrong be called “right” and right becomes “wrong.” And for a time, the voices of truth and moral accountability will be over-ruled, but ultimately not silenced.

As followers of Jesus, we must prepare ourselves to stand when others bow (Daniel 3), to pray when others don’t (Daniel 6), and to identify with Jesus in a culture whose hatred for Him sets the legal agenda (John 15:18, 19).

Father, we long for the day when You will revoke Adam’s rebellious choice. In the meantime, we reaffirm the surrender of our own temptation to want personal sovereignty. In Jesus’ name, amen.