

Justice for “Those Who Have No Helper”

Covenant Church
Sunday, February 10, 2019
Zack Phillips, Pastor

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 (NRSV)

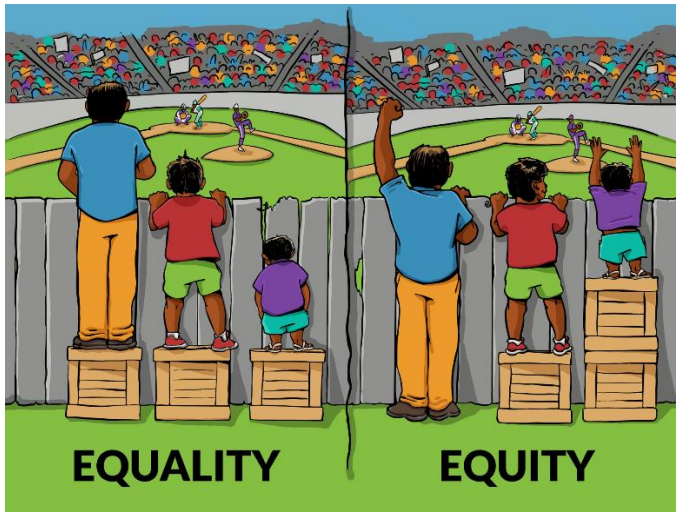
- 1 Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king’s son.
- 2 May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
- 3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
- 4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
- 5 May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
- 6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
- 7 In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

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- 10 May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.
- 11 May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.
- 12 For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
- 13 He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
- 14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

I. Introduction

1. What is justice?



Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire.¹

2. This sermon series in the life of our church: (1) meeting Jesus; (2) loving the poor; (3) doing justice

II. Biblical Justice

1. Various meanings of **מִשְׁפָּט** (“justice”): (1) Fairness in judging; (2) rightness in acting; (3) maintaining the cause of the powerless (usually the widow, orphan, needy, poor)
2. For today, elaboration of #3:
 - a. “The reversal of unhealthy economic relationships” (*New Interpreter’s Bible*); justice is “what ought to be” (Ken Wytsma).²
 - b. “Basic human rights”?³
3. Where this definition comes from...

Isa 1:16-17

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
 remove the evil of your doings
 from before my eyes;
 cease to do evil,
 learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

¹ Available at <http://interactioninstitute.org/illustrating-equality-vs-equity/>

² *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008): vol. 3, p. 477; Ken Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice: The Call to Live and Die for Bigger Things* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013): 8.

³ “Just, Justice” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1st edition; ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992): vol. 3, p. 1128.

Ps 146:5-7a:

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

See also, e.g., Ps 9; Ps 76; Ps 82; Jer 5:27-28

III. Logic?

1. Power structures rob the poor of a chance—like in the prophetic writings?

Isa 10:1-2:

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!

Isa 58:6-7:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
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 them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

2. Thieving—and murdering? St. Basil the Great
3. The purpose of blessing? Gen 12:2
4. *This* justice reflects God's character?

Jer 22:13-17:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbors work for nothing,
and does not give them their wages;
who says, "I will build myself a spacious house
with large upper rooms,"
and who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion.
Are you a king

because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
*He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.*
Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.

IV. Beyond "Conservative" and "Liberal" (as Defined in 21st-Century America)?

1. Rather than let "the world" define the terms, exercise Christian imagination
2. Not *necessarily* a retreating from worldly politics?

[There is] a spectrum of justice, moving from dialogue to works of compassion and mercy to actively attacking unjust structures... Abolitionists in the 1800s wrote newspaper editorials, organized the underground railroad, cared for injured slaves, and boycotted the products of the slave economy—all while working to pass laws banishing slavery.⁴

V. Conclusion

1. "The sin of respectable people reveals itself in flight from responsibility." —Eberhard Bethge⁵
2. "Perhaps it's possible to be neutral and not be guilty of any sin as long as we aren't fighting against God's plan. Can't we just disengage? Ask the conductor if a member of the orchestra who refuses to play his instrument is 'neutral.' This is the subtle reality of idolatry. If we aren't actively following God, we are following another conductor."—Ken Wytsma⁶

Mic 6:8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

⁴ Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice*, 10.

⁵ Eberhard Bethge, Introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1954): 11, quoted in Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice*, 17.

⁶ Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice*, 27.