

SERMON SERIES

Sermon Series: Justice Is a Gospel Issue

5-week series on biblical justice, race, and reconciliation -- from the prophets to Jesus to the early church. Theological foundations, pastoral wisdom, and congregational application.

James Bell

Lead Pastor | Founder, Pastors Connection Network | Author & Speaker

Equipping pastors and leaders to serve with excellence, integrity, and lasting Kingdom impact.

Justice Is a Gospel Issue -- Series Overview

Few subjects in the contemporary church generate more heat and less light than the relationship between the Gospel and social justice. On one side are those who insist that the church's primary calling is evangelism and that social engagement, however worthy, is a distraction from or addition to the core Gospel mission. On the other side are those who argue that justice work is itself Gospel work, and that an evangelism divorced from social transformation is neither truly evangelical nor truly transformational. This five-week series argues that both positions, as often stated, are wrong -- not because they are unbiblical, but because they are fragmentary. The full biblical vision integrates proclamation and justice in a way that cannot be finally separated without distorting both.

Week 1: God Is Just -- The Theological Foundation

Text: Psalm 89:14; Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Isaiah 61:1-3

The foundation of a biblical theology of justice is the character of God. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne" (Psalm 89:14). Justice is not something God does as a policy preference or cultural accommodation -- it is a dimension of his essential being. The God of the Bible is a God who "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18). The care of the vulnerable is not an add-on to the divine character -- it is its expression.

This has immediate implications for the church's mission. If justice is not peripheral to the character of God but central to it, then it cannot be peripheral to the mission of the people who bear his image and carry his name. The church that is indifferent to injustice is a church that has a deficient theology of God -- not just a deficient social policy. It has failed to worship the God who is, and has instead constructed a god in its own comfortable image.

Week 2: The Prophetic Mandate -- Speaking Truth to Power

Text: Isaiah 58:1-7; Amos 5:21-24; Jeremiah 22:13-17

The Old Testament prophets were not social activists who occasionally used religious language. They were theologians who understood that covenant infidelity and social injustice were the same sin, expressed in different directions. Amos's condemnation of Israel's worship was inseparable from his condemnation of their economic exploitation. Isaiah's description of the fast that God desires -- "to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free" (Isaiah 58:6) -- is not a description of social welfare policy. It is a description of what genuine worship looks like when it has been produced by genuine encounter with the holy God who cannot tolerate the suffering of those made in his image.

Week 3: Jesus and the Marginalized

Text: Luke 4:18-21; Matthew 25:31-46

(continued)

Jesus's inaugural sermon in Luke 4 is an explicit announcement that his ministry is oriented toward the specific people who are most marginalized in his society: the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed. This is not a metaphor for spiritual poverty and spiritual captivity -- those are included, but the language of Luke 4:18-19 is drawn from specific Old Testament texts (Isaiah 61, Leviticus 25) that address specific material and social conditions. Jesus's ministry to the leper, the tax collector, the woman of ill repute, the Samaritan, the demon-possessed, the dead child of a powerless family -- is the concrete enactment of his Luke 4 announcement.

Matthew 25:31-46 raises the stakes even further: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." The encounter with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned is an encounter with Christ himself. This is not primarily an ethical instruction about good citizenship -- it is an eschatological claim about where Christ is present in the world and how his people encounter him.

Weeks 4-5: The Church as Alternative Community; Justice and Evangelism

Week 4 (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-35): The early church's economic sharing was not an accidental feature of first-century Palestinian culture. It was a deliberate, theologically motivated practice: the community of the new creation enacting the economic arrangements of the Kingdom of God. "There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34) -- a direct echo of Deuteronomy 15:4's vision for covenant community. The church is meant to be a preview of the world as God intends it: a community where the mechanisms of domination and exploitation have been replaced by the practices of mutual care and radical generosity.

Week 5 (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 10:25-37): The Great Commission and the Good Samaritan belong to the same theological world. The one who goes and makes disciples of all nations is the same one who stops on the road to Jericho when everyone else has walked by. The mission of the church is not evangelism or justice -- it is the witness to the Kingdom of God, which is both the proclamation that the King has come and the demonstration of what his Kingdom looks like in practice.

Discussion Questions

1. How does your congregation currently understand the relationship between evangelism and social justice? Which tends to receive more emphasis? What would a more integrated vision look like?
2. Where in your community are the specific people Jesus identified in Luke 4:18 -- the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed? What would it mean for your congregation to be specifically oriented toward their flourishing?
3. What is one concrete justice-oriented action your congregation could take in the next 90 days that would be a genuine expression of Gospel witness in your community?

Justice is not a political cause that Christians sometimes support. It is a dimension of the character of God, a mandate of the prophets, the announcement of Jesus's ministry, and the eschatological shape of the Kingdom to which we are bearing witness. Preach it all. Live it all. And trust that the God whose throne is founded on righteousness and justice will honor the witness that reflects his character.

LiveWell by James Bell

Equipping leaders. Empowering ministry. Transforming lives.

www.livewellbyjamesbell.com