

Injustice, Proverbs 24:1-12

July 5, 2020 - Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson



Please read Proverbs 24:1-12 before going further in this transcript.

I need to begin this message with a Disclaimer: As we address the challenging topic of injustice, we will probably touch on some PG-13 material. This transcript may not be appropriate for younger readers. Please check with your parent or guardian before reading further.

As people made in God's image, most of us have a pretty high sense of justice. Especially when we have PERSONALLY been treated unjustly, we tend to respond, "Hey! That's not fair!" However, when it comes to OTHER people being treated unjustly, most of us are not as quick to respond. We tend to keep our nose out of other people's business. Or, perhaps more honestly, we tend to avoid responding because either we just don't really care, or we know how challenging it is to face injustice. Deep injustice shakes us to our core. Things like the genocide of ethnic cleansing, things like sex trafficking of innocent children, and things like the suffering of refugees fleeing from their war-torn countries; these kinds of things, bring us to our knees. Literally. We feel like all that we can do, is pray, pray, pray! One author notes, "the confrontation with violent injustice took us to the limits of our own power and capacities – in a humbling and even humiliating way."¹ In other words, dealing with injustice in our world is no small undertaking; so we dare not approach this kind of ministry flippantly or simplistically. Therefore, before you read any further, please take a minute to PRAY, "Lord please help me, as I consider the immensely overwhelming challenge of injustice in our world."

The book of Proverbs calls us to a wise response toward injustice. Now, we might think, that it would be WISER, to entirely avoid the conflicts and difficulties surrounding injustice; but that's NOT the counsel we get from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 24:11 says, "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter." Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

One of the most troubling things about injustice is the fact that it exists on such a MASSIVE scale. The fact is, as some of us stare the horrors of injustice right in the face, it causes us to ask the question: Why isn't God fixing this? It may even cause us to abandon our Christian faith entirely. Sadly, that's the recent story of the former lead singer from the Christian band, Hawk Nelson. Some of you may remember that Hawk Nelson actually did a show right here in this very sanctuary back in 2005. Our church invited people to a Sunday night concert on January 23, 2005. Tickets were just \$5!² People even came down from Canada. It was a HUGE show. I think we had around 800 people in this sanctuary! Do you happen to remember this concert? Just last month, Jon Steingard did an interview with Way Nation. In the interview, Jon very honestly explains what made him QUESTION, and then LEAVE his Christian faith: The INJUSTICE in our world.³ Jon tells a very heart-wrenching story about how seeing the deep injustice in our world, broke him; it made him question how a loving God could exist, in such a messed-up world. While I empathize with Jon, and I appreciate his honest and respectful tone, there are better ways for believers to respond to injustice.⁴ Jon IS right though...

1 Injustice is a major problem in our world.⁵ To be clear, we shouldn't confuse injustice with deprivation. Let's not confuse shortages of food, housing, and other resources with the unjust issues of OPPRESSION and EXPLOITATION. Supply shortages and injustice are two VERY different things. The fact is, simple supply shortages, have a relatively straightforward fix. But oppressive systems, and situations that exploit the weak/marginalized in our society, they require looong, hard, work. In other words, justice ministry seeks to help at a core level of human depravity and societal

¹ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 15.

² I also have the old sound clip we recorded for the 30-second radio ad.

³ Search on YouTube for "Christian Lead Singer Talks Losing His Faith in God (Hawk Nelson)" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sgo-z4TOzwc>

⁴ It's been said, "we can curse the darkness... or we can light a candle."

⁵ The injustice that we see in our world today is nothing new. Sin has been rampaging its way through individuals and societies since the day Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Since the day Cain killed his brother, Abel.

reordering. Here's how one author puts it: "We can give all manner of goods and services to the poor, but if we do not restrain the hands of the bullies, from taking it all away, then poor people simply stay poor. This explains why hundreds of millions of poor people in the world are enslaved, imprisoned, beaten, raped and robbed with ferocious regularity – they simply do not get the protection [they need]."⁶ Even Bono,⁷ the lead singer of U2 has commented: "fighting poverty is not a matter of charity; it's a matter of justice."⁸ (Some people may wonder why we are quoting Bono during a sermon. His comment makes it clear, much of our world is aware of the terrible injustice in our world. The church needs to get up to speed on this.)

Fighting injustice is a call to more than just feeding the hungry, doctoring the sick, and sheltering the homeless. Don't get me wrong, all of these things ARE important; we need to keep doing them. But we also need to figure out, how to rescue the oppressed and exploited people in our world. But not just in the world at large, but also in our own particular nation, and in our very own hometown. How to ...advocate for those who are being victimized by excessive rent prices and being mistreated by unjust labor practices. ...provide for orphans who've been abandoned not only by their parents but also sometimes by their entire community. ...rescue women and children who are being forced into prostitution.⁹ And also, how to bring justice, to the men/women who are carrying out these despicable acts of injustice, on their fellow human beings. Men, and women and children, who are made in God's image. Proverbs is a book of Wisdom & WARNINGS: Proverbs 14:31 warns, "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker..." Proverbs 17:23 says, "The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice." Proverbs 18:5 warns, "It is not good to be partial to the wicked and so deprive the innocent of justice." Proverbs 22:8 warns, "Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity..." A key part of God's remedy, for all of the injustice in our world, is calling His people to act justly.¹⁰ Consider Jesus' warning in Mathew 23:23, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Brother or Sister in Christ, injustice is a major problem in our world; and we dare not NEGLECT God's justice!

God's righteous anger is stirred up when He sees injustice in our world. God's heart is moved with compassion toward those who suffer from it.¹¹ And that's the GOOD NEWS about Injustice: "The Good News about injustice is that God is against it!"¹²

2 God is against injustice. I'm borrowing this phrase from a book by Gary Haugen, titled "Good News About Injustice." Some of my primary research came from this book. God is actively, daily, rescuing victims of injustice. We know this because the victims have told us their stories of being rescued. The story of a child who scrawled "Bible verses on the walls of the brothel where she was being serially raped." She prayed to Jesus for rescue and she WAS rescued and resurrected to life. She was restored to her family. She went on to graduate from college and "boldly speak before crowds of thousands, in the public fight to end sex trafficking."¹³ We know that God is rescuing victims of injustice from the stories of former slaves from rice mills, rock quarries, and brick factories who took their freedom in hand and went on to build businesses of their own. Businesses that allowed them to feed their families, send their kids to school, and "even help rescue others held in slavery."¹⁴ We know that God is rescuing victims of injustice from the stories of destitute widows who were thrown off their own land by local bullies. Widows who had their homes and land restored to them.

⁶ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 23.

⁷ Sounds like "BAH no."

⁸ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 23.

⁹ ...work for the release of those being illegally imprisoned and tortured. ...advocate for widows whose land is being stolen from them. Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 26.

¹⁰ Micah 6:8 reminds us, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? **To act justly** and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." See Zechariah 8:16 and the footnotes in your Study Bible.

¹¹ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 9.

¹² Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, back cover.

¹³ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ - The stories of young "girls once curled up in fetal positions from abuse in brothels" who grew up to become "women of great dignity and beauty." Women who went on to get married, raise children, and lead raids to help rescue other children suffering under the violence of injustice. Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 19.

Who regained their dignity, grew food for their children, and went on to run schools, and to train leaders in their community, on how to prevent other widows, from having their land violently taken away from them.¹⁵ Brother or Sister in Christ, we need to hear these stories.¹⁶ We need to LEARN MORE about the injustice that is going on in our world. Not just injustice in other nations, but injustice right here in America. Right here in the Bemidji area. God is against injustice! God will bring to justice, those who are perpetrators of injustice.

Take a look at these verses from Psalm 10 (verses 2-3, 8, 10-11, 14, 17-18)¹⁷ “In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts about the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD... He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent. His eyes watch in secret for his victims... His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength. He says to himself, “God will never notice; he covers his face and never sees.” ...But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless... You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.”¹⁸

Woe to anyone who ignores these warnings. God’s judgments are just; there will be no mistakes in God’s court. No bribes, no false witnesses, no inadmissible evidence. Everything will be laid bare, and justice will be rightly and FULLY administered. Those who abuse their power, who abuse people by oppressing them and exploiting their weaknesses, will be held accountable. SOME not until the final judgment, but SOME in the here and now. When unjust practices and unjust people are brought to justice, God is pleased BECAUSE God is against injustice, and so should you and I be. Our hearts should be broken by the same things that break God’s heart.¹⁹ Battling injustice is part of our Christian witness;²⁰ it’s part of our testimony, because it testifies to the true nature of God’s character.²¹ This leads right into our final point.

3 Christ-followers should take action against injustice. In the OT book of Isaiah, God questions the sincerity of His followers. Supposedly, they want to know God and to do what is right, but their empty religious observances, were just a false pretending. Isaiah 58:2-6 says, “For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

In other words, God wants more from us than empty lip service and shallow religious observances; God wants “outward evidence of genuine righteousness.”²² That outward evidence is displayed in the way we rescue those who are suffering from injustice. It is displayed in the way we

¹⁵ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 19.

¹⁶ Some of you may be asking, “Why have we never heard these stories before Pastor Jerry?” I hadn’t heard most of them either. That is, not until this week, when I began digging into the topic of injustice with greater sincerity.

¹⁷ I wish we’d time to read all of Psalm 10, but time only allowed me a brief overview. When you have time, read all of Psalm 10.

¹⁸ Read Romans 2:5-8. Acts 17:31 reminds us, “For he (God) has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man (Jesus) he has appointed...” See also Psalm 62:12; Matthew 16:27; 2 Timothy 4:14; and Revelation 18:6.

¹⁹ Bob Pierce said, “Let my heart be broken by the things that break God’s heart.”

²⁰ This is why the Evangelical Free Church of America added article #8 to our Statement of Faith, “Christian Living - We believe that God’s justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God’s Word, the Spirit’s power, and fervent prayer in Christ’s name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ’s commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.”

²¹ See Isaiah 19:20. Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, bottom of pp. 47, 50.

²² *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1202 footnote on Isaiah 58:7.

work toward setting free the oppressed. Proverbs 24:10-12 says, “If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength! Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, “But we knew nothing about this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?”²³

In other words, true Christ-followers will not make excuses that fighting injustice is too hard, or that it’s a hopeless task, or try to pretend that they just didn’t know about injustice. If we genuinely love our neighbors as ourselves, we will not so easily look away, much like our loving God doesn’t look away. One author notes: “In whatever way or in whatever place the lawless pervert justice, the disciple must show [his/her] mettle and intervene and not act cowardly, nor ignore or pass by the wrongdoing.”²⁴ In other words, we are called to respond to injustice. We are called to join God’s rescue mission to the oppressed and exploited.²⁵

When we hear about injustice, it may be tempting to ask: What has this to do with me? Gary Haugen writes about this question in his book, “Good News About Injustice.” He was sent over to investigate the Rwandan genocide. When the Hutus slaughtered countless innocent Tutsis in cold blood, he asked himself, what this horrible injustice on the other side of the world, had to do with him. At that time, Gary was a lawyer working in America. He taught 6th grade Sunday School on the weekends at his local church. What has this to do with me? Gary writes, “It had everything to do with me because of what my God loves and what my God hates.... “Jesus loves the little children / All the children of the world / Red and yellow, black and white / They are precious in his sight.” When Martin Luther King Jr. was asked what he was doing in a jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama, this was his reply: “because injustice is here.”²⁶ God’s people should hate injustice as much as He does. And that should motivate us to action.

We are responsible for what we know. Therefore, it’s tempting to know as little as possible.²⁷ It’s tempting to avoid learning more about injustice, because then we can avoid that nagging feeling in the pit of our gut, that tells us that we need to respond. Isaiah 1:17 challenges us to learn: “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed....”²⁸ Christ-followers need to learn about injustice:²⁹

1) Read “Good News About Injustice” by Gary A. Haugen.³⁰ John Stott wrote the foreword to the 10th anniversary edition of Gary’s book. Here’s what Stott says, “I defy anybody to emerge from exposure to this book unscathed. In fact, my advice to would-be readers is “Don’t! Leave the book alone!” – unless you are willing to be shocked, challenged, persuaded and transformed.”³¹

2) Read the article “Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]”³² It’s free by simply Googling the title.

3) Listen to “The Gospel, Compassion and Justice, and the EFCA.”³³ These 8 powerful teachings were recorded in 2018, at our annual EFCA Theology Conference.

<https://www.efca.org/resources>

4) Watch “Addressing Racism in Your Church” on YouTube. It’s a 30-minute dialogue between 3 people in the EFCA. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKsJ7f0APsG>

5) Watch the “Holy Post – Race in America” YouTube video.³⁴ The Holy Post is one of the few podcasts that I subscribe to. I don’t agree with everything they say, but they sure do make me think.

²³ Bible commentator Derek Kidner subtitles Proverbs 24:10-12, “The Quitter.” He notes that, “Exceptional strain (10) and avoidable responsibility (11, 12) are fair tests...of a [person’s] mettle.” Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008 format, p. 146.

²⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p. 277.

²⁵ Proverbs 24:12 adds insult to injury. Not only did some of them falter in verse 10, but then in verse 12 they try to lie about it. “To the injustice of not helping... [they] add the injustice of lying.” Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p. 277.

²⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, April 16, 1963, p. 1.

²⁷ There’s a song lyric “they still press their faces to the window.” It’s a satire on the advertisements we see on our screens for helping starving children. It’s easier to change the channel or click on a different page. It’s harder to consider how we can help with this kind of injustice.

²⁸ A much stricter warning is issued in Exodus 22:22-24.

²⁹ But Pastor Jerry, “I’ve got enough problems of my own.” I know. Me too. Even so, I recommend that we all endeavor to learn more about injustice.

³⁰ Gary is the president and CEO of the International Justice Mission. Formerly, he worked with the civil rights division of the US Department of Justice and he was the director of the United Nations genocide investigation in Rwanda. He’s a Harvard University graduate, but his book is very readable and accessible to any adult.

³¹ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 11.

³² For those of us in the Bemidji area, let’s learn about the negro plight which can give us helpful applications for the plight of our Native American neighbors. https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

³³ <https://www.efca.org/resources/document/gospel-compassion-and-justice-and-efca>

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGUwcs9gJXY>

The content is primarily the work of Skye Jethani, Christian Taylor, and Phil Vischer, the creator of Veggie Tales. In this post, “Race in America,” Phil Vischer gives a powerful 18-minute presentation regarding injustice. It’s worth a listen. In fact, if you’ve been confused by the recent racial hostility surrounding “Black Lives Matter,” you may find this video instructive. Phil Vischer ends his video by giving one piece of advice about injustice. When it comes to injustice, it’s the very best piece of advice I’ve ever heard. Here it is: care.

How should Christ-followers respond to injustice?

1) By caring.³⁵ Pray for a heart like God’s heart, a heart that truly cares about injustice. Let’s allow ourselves to weep over injustice.³⁶

2) By learning. Learn more about injustice. I just listed several good resources. Certainly, there are many more.

3) By doing... something. Each of us may be called to different things.

1. Sponsor a child. (Global Fingerprints, Compassion, etc.)

2. Take on a courageous job. Become a lawyer, politician, social worker, law enforcement officer, refugee worker, etc. Serve at that job as one who upholds the rule of law in God-honoring ways; someone who works to reform and overthrow injustice from within the system.

3. Advocate for local justice. Befriend someone who’s suffering from injustice. Advocate for anyone who is being treated unjustly, whether they are Anglo, Native, or some other ethnicity. Expose unjust landlords in our community. Support the anti-trafficking task force.

4. Pray and then take action on whatever God lays on our heart. Let’s allow our righteous indignation regarding injustice, to fuel our courage to speak up and take action.

Let me wrap up by sharing one of the most challenging, and disturbing things, that I’ve ever read about injustice: It’s often difficult to distinguish between the church and the world, because the church “accommodates itself to the prevailing culture of injustice and indifference.”³⁷ Ouch!³⁸ May this NOT be true of E-Free Bemidji! Mr. Rogers once said, “We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.” Brother or Sister in Christ, the Gospel that we claim to believe, is a Gospel of Justice. It brings in God’s reign, which brings in God’s justice. Jesus taught His followers to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”³⁹ As followers of Jesus, let’s muster up the compassion, and the strength,⁴⁰ and the courage that we need, to respond to injustice.⁴¹

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³⁵ Consider Matthew 9:36.

³⁶ Let’s also live on budgets that enable us to give toward just causes. Let’s support anyone who feels called to serve in the dangerous and dark places of injustice. See Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 18.

³⁷ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, p. 10.

³⁸ Isaiah 59:14-16 paints a troubling picture, “So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. **The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.** He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene.” See also Ezekiel 22:27, 30.

³⁹ Psalm 45:6 declares, “...a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.”

⁴⁰ I wish that we would have had time to talk about strength in this sermon. Our strength comes from the wisdom God grants us. Proverbs 21:22 says, “One who is wise can go up against the city of the mighty and pull down the stronghold in which they trust.” Our strength comes from having the Lord at our side (See 2 Timothy 4:17). If the Lord is NOT at our side, then we may be on the wrong side. It’s been said that “with great power, comes great responsibility.” Proverbs 24:5 reminds us that sometimes those who have knowledge, need to “muster their strength.” Proverbs 24:10 is not a question, it’s a reminder. Times of trouble are times when we need to be strong! We need God’s power if we are going to launch any meaningful response to the injustice in this world. Bible Commentator Bruce Waltke subtitled the first part of Proverbs 24 as “Strength in Distress.” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p. 269.) Proverbs 3:27 reminds us, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.” And James 4:17 tells us, “If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”

⁴¹ It is our joyful privilege “to work as co-laborers with the Creator, in extending His Kingdom over one more life, one more family, one more neighborhood, one more community. [As] The people of God, [may we] find in Christ, the compassion and courage to engage the call to justice! Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, bottom of pp. 48-49.