

Answer the Cry Biblical Justice Sermon

Read Scripture

We continue on in our sermon series called Biblical Justice. Whoever has ears, let them hear the Word of the Lord, in the Book of Genesis, and the Gospel of Matthew. This is the Word of the Lord. Genesis 21:14-19 ; Matthew 27:45-54.

The Cry for Justice

Imagine a small child sitting cross-legged on a carpeted floor with sunlight streaming through the window and a circle of colourful lego pieces surrounding her. She's totally lost in the imagination of her creation, yet at the same time perfectly at home. Piece by piece the girl carefully selects the colour and shape of each block, and places them with precision and care on the tower she is constructing. She hums a happy melody as she builds in the warmth of the room, a song of delight for her masterpiece in the making.

Suddenly, chaos enters the room in the form a snotty nosed brother who is lost in his own imagination, spinning through the room like a Tasmanian devil. The tornado of a child catches sight of his sister, and the lego tower she is building. He's drawn to it like a moth to a flame, like a magnet to metal, like a twister to Dorothy's house. And in one swift motion the boy smashes the building to the ground and disappears as quickly as he came.

Then came the cry. [p] The cry for justice. It's a cry that's not unique to our little girl. It's a cry made by millions of people across our world today — Like in the Ukraine, or on First Nations reservations here in Canada, or in the homes of - it is the cry for justice.

And the cry for justice takes on many different forms. At times, it is sounded as a cry of anger. Anger at what has taken place, anger at injustice. CS Lewis has said, "Anger is the fluid love bleeds when cut."¹ That's what the cry sounds like - anger.

Other times, the cry for justice is a cry for help - it's the cry of the helpless. Many in the Ukraine are making this cry today. Help, we need help. But there are many in our city making this cry too. Help! I need to choose between buying groceries or paying rent.

Sometimes the cry for justice sound like sorrow and despair. It cry's out, "no one cares," or sometimes, "God doesn't care, he has abandoned me!"

But in its myriad forms, all of these cry's for justice—the cry of anger, the cry for help, the cry of despair — they all have one thing in common. They are all a cry to make right what has gone wrong. This is the heart of every cry for justice: God, make right what has gone wrong.

This morning I want us to consider the cry for justice in our world and how God has responded to it. And having laid that as the foundation I want to give some practical guidance on how we as God's church might respond to what is Canada's longest-standing cry for justice - the cry coming from the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. But first, we look to our God.

God Answers the Cry for Justice

When we read through the first few books of the Old Testament we are presented with an unfolding picture of who God is *through stories of what he does*. We aren't given a list of bullet-point precepts teaching us that God is love or holy or just, rather we are given a set of real stories that demonstrate his character. I read one of them this morning, in Genesis 21. It's

¹ CS Lewis, Letters to Malcolm

the story of Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar was an Egyptian slave in a Hebrew family - but not just any family. She was a servant of Abraham and Sarah, the forefather and mother of Israel. God had promised that they would have many children and that their descendants would fill the earth and be a blessing to all other nations of the world. But the problem was, Abraham and Sarah couldn't get pregnant. So they agree to a plan together where Hagar—their Egyptian servant—would become the surrogate mother. Hagar gets pregnant and has a boy, Ishmael. But it's not long after that Sarah finally becomes pregnant by Abraham with a boy of her own, Isaac. And this jealousy wells up in Sarah. She begins to resent Hagar and her son Ishmael, and in the Genesis 21 story Sarah and Abraham send Hagar and her son off into the desert, with a few supplies to rid themselves of the resentment. It's a horrible story of injustice really.

So Hagar runs out of water, and Genesis 21 says she places her boy under a bush, and she sits a little distance off because she doesn't want to watch him die. And she begins to sob. It's a horrible scene. But let's pay attention to the text: Hagar is crying. She is crying the cry for justice - for God to make right what has gone wrong. And so is the boy, Ishmael. They are both crying for justice!

Let's pick up the story again in verse 17: "**God heard the boy crying**, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; **God has heard the boy crying** as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink."

The story is telling us who God is by what he does. And what does God do. He hears the cry, and he answers it! God answers the cry for justice. Our God is the God of justice. He answers the cry of Ishmael - the son of an Egyptian slave to a Hebrew family.

And we see this story repeated again, with different characters a little later in history. But this time God answers the cry of the sons and daughters of Hebrew slaves to Egyptian families. [p] It's the most famous story in the entire Old Testament, and it begins in Exodus 3. "The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. **I have heard them crying out** because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians..." (Ex 3:7-8). God hears the cry of his people living under the oppressive thumb of Egypt and he answers, he rescues them and leads them to the promised land. When it comes to the cry for justice, God hears and God answers.

Jesus is God's Answer to the Cry

Now, Fast forward again in history, to Jesus, the one they called Immanuel, God with us. Throughout his ministry we see that he also hears the cry and answers with great compassion.

Matthew 15:22: "A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, **crying out**, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." The woman cries out, make right what is wrong, and Jesus answered the cry.

Mark 10, a blind man named Bartimaeus cries out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus cries out, make right what is wrong, and Jesus answered the cry.

Time after time in the Gospels the poor, the needy, the hungry, the the oppressed, they cry out to Jesus, and he answers the cry - sometimes in surprising ways. The point is, the Jesus we read about in the New Testament Gospels is the same God we read about in the Old Testament. He hears and answers the cry for justice with compassion.

But there is way more to Jesus than his compassion for the oppressed and impoverished. Jesus doesn't simply answer the cry, he *is* the answer to it. Jesus is God's answer to the cry for justice.

Think about it for a moment. Isn't every cry, other than a child crying for a parent, isn't every cry born out of out of some sinful act, some disobedience to God. Think about the tears you have cried out to God in your own life - haven't they come from sin and the brokenness it causes - either someone else's, or your own. The cry of the Ukrainian people today is cry because of the sins done against them. The cry of our First Nations neighbours are because governments, churches, and citizens, past and present have sinned against them. Even the cry of the sick is a cry that entered our world because sin broke something in the fabric of God's physical creation. Or the cry of the world's poor and hungry, it is the result of systems of greed and exploitation and war.

The truth of the matter is every cry for God to make right what has gone wrong, every cry for justice is because we live in a world where human beings fail to choose God's way, we fail to live up to his standard. We cry out to God because of the sins committed against us and we cry out to him because of the sins we have committed ourselves. Every cry for justice is born out of sin.

Which means, compassion cannot ultimately save us! Make no mistake! We need more compassion in our world! The restoration of God's world to God's good order will come through walking the road of compassion. We need Jesus' compassion to know that God sees us, to know he sees our deep human needs, we need his compassion to know that we are loved by God. But compassion alone isn't God's answer to the cry for justice. Compassion may tend the wounds of injustice, but it doesn't pull out the thorn!

Jesus doesn't simply answer the cry, he becomes the answer to it. He has come to pull out the thorn of sin that causes injustices, big and small.

And we see that in a cry Jesus makes himself on the cross. On the night Jesus, the Son of God, was executed on a Roman Cross, he cried out! He cried out a cry of deep despair in his own language. In English the cry was, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46.

Jesus, the son of God cried out to God the Father, "where have you gone?" "Why have you forsaken me?" "Why have you left me all alone?" What's behind this cry? Did God the Father abandon Jesus the son in that very moment? Did the Father separate from the son? In a mysterious word, yes. In that moment, Jesus cries out because in that moment, every sin, past, present, and future was laid upon his shoulders, including mine, including yours. And the great curse of sin was exacted upon the sinless Jesus - he bore the judgment for our transgressions, he was cut-off from God the father, he was making right what our collective sin has made wrong. He was answering the cry! [p] In that moment on the cross Jesus cried out because in that moment he was bearing for us the inevitable separation from God that sin causes and deserves. His cry from the cross, was God's answer to humanities cry for justice.

As the Apostle Paul puts it, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21 We become right with God, because Jesus took on our wrongs. It's God's answer to the cry.

Whoever has ears, let them hear and not miss this! The world's hope, the world's only hope is found only in Jesus Christ: God hears the cries of injustice and he answers with compassion and a lasting solution. Jesus tends our wounds, and he pulls out the thorn of sin that causes

them, once and for all. What remains is for every knee to bow and every tongue confess that he is the answer to the cry. [p] And for every knee that bows and tongue that confesses to follow his lead in being people of justice in our world.

The Church is The Body of Christ's Justice on the Earth

Which raises the question: How should we, followers of Jesus, God's church, approach the injustices of our day? What is our Christian responsibility as ambassadors of Jesus in the world. Well, we need to follow Jesus' lead: We should first listen for the cry, and second answer it with the compassion and gospel of Jesus Christ.

But what does that actually look like? And how is the Christian response to injustices different than how the rest of the world responds? Let's turn to a living example.

Let's turn to the oldest living example of injustice in Canadian History: the cry of the Indigenous People's of Canada. What does following Jesus tangibly look like for you and me when it comes to their cry for justice?

First, we need to hear the cry. We need to come to terms with the Indigenous voices who are saying, and have been saying all along, there is a problem! We need to hear their cry and recognized they have a claim before God about how they, as God's image bearers in the world, have been treated wrongly and how it has left lasting wounds. We need to hear the cry. It sounds simple, but the truth of the matter is, there is a segment of people who through either ignorance or stubbornness or both quickly dismiss the cry, or flat out ignore it. But Church, we need to hear it, because our God hears it, and he wants to do something about it!

A practical step to hearing the cry is to take time listen to the stories of those who have suffered under the racist actions of Canadian society, government, and churches.

Jennifer Singh is a professor at Ambrose University and minister of a church on a First Nation in southern Alberta. She is their pastor, and she is listening to the cry. She hears stories of children forcibly taken from their homes and placed in government sanctioned, church run residential schools and the horrible treatment they experienced there.² One member of her church speaks of how her father never wore shorts, because as a child in one of these schools he was forced to spend hours kneeling on an iron rod staring at a picture of Jesus as a form of punishment. It was a punishment that left permeant scars he kept hidden from the world.

Another member tells the story of the day her grinding hunger became so bad that she finally "gave into" the invitation of the nuns, who said, "Come to the House of the Lord, and we will take care of you." She had always been afraid of the church because of her parents' and grandparents' stories about these settlers, but she believed the nuns would help her and her siblings. As soon as they arrived, the nuns called Children and Family Services and split up her and her siblings for the rest of their childhood. She grew up in a system where she experienced horrific amounts of abuse and violence. We need to hear the cry for justice, we can do that by listening to stories like these, as hard as that may be for some.

Another tangible step in hearing the cry is to listen through learning. We can learn about the history of what actually took place between the host peoples of this great country and the colonists that arrived on her shores. The church can listen by learning - and there are many great books on the subject. The University of Alberta also has a free online course. Or you can read the 94 Calls to Action, which are 94 action steps put together by the Indigenous Peoples of Canada who are saying, these steps will help us heal. This is how we can hear the cry.

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/june-web-only/kamloops-residential-school-canada-first-nations-church.html>

Second, having heard the cry, we can follow Jesus and answer with compassion. [p] And can I tell you what compassion doesn't sound like. It doesn't say, "I'm not racist so this isn't really my problem." Compassion doesn't dismiss the cry of other people. It doesn't say, "It happened in the past, and I shouldn't be held accountable for other people's sins." Compassion doesn't make excuses for injustices. It doesn't say, "Can't they just forgive and forget, we've said sorry already." Compassion isn't impatient or insensitive. Could you ever imagine Jesus answering the cry that way? Never! Compassion, the compassion Jesus leads us in, are actions that say to the suffering, "I see you. You matter. Wrong has been done, and God cares about making things right." We can answer the cry with compassion.

And lastly, we answer the cry with the gospel of Jesus. This is what sets us apart from the rest of the world. We believe the lasting solution to all of the world's injustices is only possible in and through Jesus Christ. Only his sacrifice can cover over the sins committed in the past and bring healing to those who have been sinned against. Only his gospel can bring the kind of healing and freedom that we all need for these wrongs to be made right. So, as followers of Christ, in word and deed, we can bear witness to the Son of God who was himself wounded by the sins of others in order to break the curse those sins have caused. And when we trust our lives to him, to Jesus, not the church, not the government, not society, when we trust our lives to the son of the Creator, he can bring the forgiveness, healing, and true reconciliation that we all desperately need. And heaven knows, we all need it.

Let's Pray.