



The Virtues of Jesus: Justice

Sermon Notes by Ryan Matchett

April 6, 2025

The Virtues of Jesus: Justice in a World of Influence

We're continuing our Lenten reflections on the virtues of Jesus—these deep internal realities that formed His character and guided His life. And today, we come to one of the most profound and yet challenging virtues of all: **justice**.

But before we look at the parable before us, I want to name something that I've been noticing more and more in our culture. It's the growing gap between what we call "influence" and what Scripture calls "virtue."

There is a kind of **pressure in our world to pick a side**, to believe a certain narrative, to feel the right things and say the right things in order to belong. This is what I'd call *outside-in* culture. The culture of influence. It promises identity, meaning, and purpose if you just stay current, stay vocal, stay compliant. But the reality is: your feet are never sure. You're left constantly reaching for more information or looking for the next leader or trend to tell you what's true and good.

But the Way of Jesus—the *Way of Virtue*—is the exact opposite. It's not outside-in. It's **inside-out**. The virtues of Jesus—love, humility, patience, obedience, wisdom, courage, and justice—aren't dictated by the world. They rise up from the indwelling presence of the Spirit. They are things we choose to live by no matter the circumstances, no matter the cultural current, no matter who's watching.

To compromise them is not just to compromise yourself. It's to betray your God, your own identity, and your calling in the world.

So you can say, with full confidence:

"I don't know everything about this particular issue, but I do know what is virtuous. I know love when I see it. I know humility, wisdom, and justice when I see them. And those things have my full support—whatever the cost, whatever the discomfort, no matter who it upsets."

A Parable of Injustice

Now, I'll be honest: at first glance, **today's Lenten Scripture**—*The Parable of the Wicked Tenants* (Luke 20:9–19)—might not seem like the best example of Jesus' passion for justice. It's violent. It's confrontational. It ends with destruction. But look again, and you'll see a fierce love that burns against injustice and refuses to let evil win.

Let's walk through the parable.

What did the tenants do?

1. They took ownership of land that wasn't theirs.
2. They refused to honour their agreement with the landowner.
3. They abused and killed his servants.
4. They ultimately murdered his son, thinking they could steal his inheritance.
5. And finally, the landowner comes in righteous judgment—**He destroys those tenants and gives the vineyard to others.**

The deeper meaning?

Jesus is speaking directly to the religious leaders of His day. They had taken ownership over God's Temple and God's Law—but instead of using them to shepherd the people into the love and justice of God, they used them to elevate themselves. Their leadership became a system of control, self-promotion, and oppression.

That story isn't just about first-century priests. It's about every human institution. It's about pastors, parents, politicians, condo associations—anyone entrusted with responsibility. When that trust is twisted by sin, it results in injustice. The people who were supposed to be cared for end up wounded. The weak are silenced. The poor are dismissed. And anyone who tries to call for change—prophets, reformers, the Spirit-led voices of correction—gets cast out.

As Jesus says, **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"** (Matt 23). Over and over, He exposes this kind of religious hypocrisy—where the outside looks good, but the inside is full of self-serving darkness.

Jesus says the landowner sent servant after servant. Luke tells us they were *beaten and cast out*. Think of the prophets—Jeremiah, Amos, Isaiah, Elijah. Nehemiah 9:30 summarizes it all:

“Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear.”

Eventually, the landowner sends his own Son.

Surely, they will listen to Him.

Surely, His presence will turn their hearts.

But the Son’s arrival **doesn’t soften their hearts—it exposes them**. Once they realize who He is, they plot to kill Him.

Jesus’ parable is a warning: **the Son reveals the heart**. And when He comes to judge, He won’t judge based on words or positions. He’ll judge based on *virtue*. On *justice*. On *love*.

Do you remember how Jesus says He will judge the tenants of creation—whether they are families, businesses, nations, churches, or community groups?

He says in Matthew 25:

“I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink... as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

Every act of neglect or injustice against the poor, the stranger, the sick—is a rejection of the Son.

And what is the Father’s righteous response?

The Righteous Judgment of God

Jesus says: *He will come and destroy those tenants*.

This isn’t symbolic. This is justice.

Every leader, every system, every soul will be **sifted by the Cornerstone**.

Every priest, Prime Minister, teacher, doctor, city council member, and parent will give an account to the Creator—and the standard will be the **virtues of Christ**.

And here is the glorious reversal:

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”
Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. (Luke 20:17–18)

JI Packer once said:

“Those who take offense at Jesus—whether through unbelief, pride, or self-righteousness—experience the breaking judgment of God, though not the final crushing yet.”

“Broken to pieces.” That’s what happens when we harden our hearts to the Son. It’s not just a bad choice—it’s a spiritual collapse. A disorientation of the soul. You lose your sense of God, your vision of Scripture, your love for others, and your ability to walk in the truth.

For Those Who Trust in the Cornerstone

For those who say yes to the Cornerstone, who build their lives on the Way of Jesus, there is hope. There is safety. There is a different kind of strength rising within you.

Jesus understands the cost of standing for justice in a broken world. He saves us from our complicity in injustice. He empowers us by His Spirit to pursue righteousness—even when it’s unpopular, even when it costs us everything.

Bonhoeffer reminds us:

“Your ‘yes’ to God requires your ‘no’ to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor...”

So we stand. Not on the shaky ground of influence. Not on the ever-shifting narratives of this world. We stand on **the Cornerstone**—the only sure foundation of love, righteousness, and justice.

And now, we turn to Him in prayer.

Let’s allow the Spirit to search our hearts and lead us into deeper healing, deeper repentance, deeper calling, and deeper hope.

Take a moment to ask Jesus these four questions:

1. **What injustice have I experienced in this broken world—what wound am I still carrying—that needs the Life of Jesus to come near, understand, and**

heal me?

He is not distant. He is Emmanuel. Let His compassion meet your pain.

2. **What injustice have I committed or participated in—directly or indirectly—that the Cross of Jesus needs to forgive and cleanse?**

This is the moment of mercy. The blood of Jesus is enough. Bring it into the light.

3. **In what ways is the Resurrection of Jesus calling me to stand for justice in this dark world?**

Not in your own strength, but in resurrection power. Where is He inviting you to rise and defend the downtrodden?

4. **In what ways does the promise of His coming justice dispel discouragement and despair in me?**

Hope is not naive. Hope is sure. Justice is coming, and it will not delay.

Let's bring all of this to Jesus—our Cornerstone.

The One who sees.

The One who knows.

The One who heals.

The One who reigns.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come and restore Your vineyard.

Come and reign with justice.

Come and let virtue flourish once again.

Amen.