

The words righteousness and justice are interchangeable in scripture.
From a biblical perspective put simply, the word “justice” means “to make right.”

God’s good purposes to put the world to rights.

To bring God’s beauty and order to our broken chaos.

Justice means loving our neighbour as we love ourselves
and is rooted in the character and nature of God.

As God is just and loving, so we are called to be just and loving.

Hearts and attitudes shaped by a concern for the ways of
peace, mercy, fairness and compassion.

SERMON – THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE

This of course is the Holy Bible, officially in the Guinness Book of Records, the best-selling book of all time.

I don’t know if you’ve ever held it like this, separating the Old and New Testament.

But it’s interesting to see just how thick the O/T is compared to the N/T.

It’s also good to remind ourselves, that this bit (the O/T) ... is the scripture that Jesus knew. Jesus grew up **with** – and was formed **by**, the message of these Scriptures

What’s really important for us as Christians, is that we see this part (O/T) through the lens of this part - the N/T. The 4 Gospels - The Book of Acts - Letters from Paul and others – and the Book of Revelation.

Equally, we must see this part (the N/T) through the lens of this part (O/T)

Because only then, can we get the FULL context and truly understand Grand story of which we are all part. Because this is what the bible is.

**The Bible is one unified epic story that leads to Jesus.
But the story not only culminates and crescendos in Jesus;
it also continues, because of Jesus.**

Most of the problems people encounter in the bible, is for 2 main reasons...

- Firstly, we fail to understand that it’s written in different genres.

There’s Historical Narrative. There’s Story and Metaphor, as in The Parables.

There’s Poetry and the Wisdom and Prophecy literature.

And there’s also the dramatic, symbolic imagery, as in the Book of Revelation. This is the Apocalyptic genre.

- The second problem occurs when we don’t understand, that each verse, chapter or book, **always** sits **within the context** of the greater whole. The Big Unfolding Story.

As someone so brilliantly put it ...

“if you take a text outside of its con-text you may be left with a con”.

Now you might not be ‘conned’ as such, but you will probably be confused, come to a wrong understanding and just not appreciate the full picture.

Here’s an illustration I find helpful.

Whenever I used to do jigsaw puzzles, I’d always start with the 4 corners and then fit all the sides together. This gave me my framework in which to fit the whole big picture together.

But the only thing that made all this even possible, was having the completed picture on the front of the box, sitting in front of me. Because now I could see what the big picture looked like, I could make sense of how all the other pieces fitted together.

Scripture is very much like this.

We need to keep the Big picture, Grand story, meta narrative in front of us ... at all times! Otherwise we risk taking some pieces out of their biblical, theological context.

The History of Christianity has some sad episodes because Christians took a few passages of scripture and put together a whole skewed theology from these pieces.

The reason I picked the 3 passages today is because (1) they all capture the heart of the big message of scripture. And **(2)** they show us that there's a golden thread running through this big picture story. If I was thinking musically I'd say it's the ever-present drumbeat, pulsing its way through the message. And it can be captured in 4 words.

Gods FAITHFULNESS, God's GRACE and God's CALLING for us to live out God's TRUTH

SO, TO BEGIN THIS SERMON SERIES, LETS PUT THE BIG PICTURE IN FRONT OF US.

From Genesis to Revelation let's spend a few minutes exploring how this golden thread and central drumbeat message reveals itself.

In the beginning, a faithful God, in an act of loving intrinsic grace, creates the entire universe and 6 times declares it all very good.

Then in Genesis v 26, God says **"Let US make human beings in OUR image, to be like US.**

Super important context for the whole big picture story.

We believe in a Trinitarian God.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit there at the beginning of existence.

What this gives us, is the deeply profound truth that in the beginning is **Relationship!**

And everything in the universe flows from this eternal truth.

- **So here's the first piece of the jigsaw.**

The universe is intrinsically Good and Sacred **AND** God gives humankind a vocation. **A CALLING.**

We are to be the image bearers of God in the world.

To live in such a way that we reflect the truth, beauty and goodness of God.

We are created for harmonious relationship, with God, with each other and the created order.

- **Then comes the 2nd piece of the story.**

The piece we call THE FALL. Humanity stuffs up. We basically rebel against the good ways of God.

The ways of justice and righteousness. All that is just and good.

- **But then in Faithfulness and Grace,** God makes a covenant with man called Abraham and chooses a people and a nation (Israel) to go out and be a light and a blessing to all nations. This is their **Calling.**

But Israel has a hard time keeping their part of this covenant going.

It's a constant story of disobedience and a failure to live out their calling and vocation. This is **why** we hear all the Prophets giving Israel such a hard time. As we heard in Isaiah today.

19 Who is as blind and deaf as my own chosen people. My servant and messenger?

20 You see and recognize what is right but refuse to act on it.

You hear with your ears, but you don't really listen."

**God's people losing sight of their true calling,
to serve the purposes of God's call... for justice.**

And this is as relevant for God's people now, as it was then

But the prophets also tell the people that one day a Messiah will come. And this person will show the world how to put all that's wrong – back to rights. Isaiah 42v1 ...

1 "Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.

He is my chosen one, who pleases me.

I have put my Spirit upon him.

He will bring justice to the nations.

He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.

As we saw in the video, this is the point where the O/T story ends. Unresolved.

But for Christians, what comes next, is the crucial jigsaw piece in the big story.

The drum beat of God's Faithfulness, Grace and Calling goes on. We call it the Incarnation. The Word becomes flesh.

- **Enter Jesus Christ**

In His life and teaching, Jesus Christ shows us what it *looks like* to be the image bearers of God. To be instruments of God's Justice, peace, mercy and love.

Because Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

But Jesus also reminds his own people and anyone who would call themselves a follower, that there this Calling to live out God's vision for justice and shalom.

As God is just and loving, said Jesus ... you as God's people are called to be just and loving.

It's what the Sermon on The Mount is all about.

- **All this culminates in the Cross and Resurrection.**

The pivotal moment of not just the message of Scripture... but also the pivotal moment for human history.

Jesus takes on - absorbs the worst of humanity - and through the act of sacrificial love, breaks the grip of sin, rebellion and death.

Through the pure gift of God's grace, *'so that we cannot boast'...* and through faith in Christ, humanity is given the opportunity for a brand-new start. Salvation. The Old has passed the new has come. **The Resurrection inaugurates this new creation way.**

- **So now Enter the Church.**

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we the 'Church' – Christ's body, hands and feet ... are called to be co-workers in God's mission purposes to restore, reconcile and redeem all creation.

This is the full expression of God's vision for Truth and Justice. To put the broken, hurting world back to rights. **And St Paul captures all of this perfectly in Ephesians 2**

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In this one passage from Paul, is that golden thread, the drumbeat running through the message of scripture. The Faithfulness and Grace of God, but also the Calling of God to live out good works. And Paul, is simply echoing Jesus.

In Matthew 5:16, **“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds/good works and glorify your Father in heaven”**

Our salvation is totally a gift of God’s *Grace and Faithfulness*.

But having received the gift, what are we going to do with it?

Because to accept the gift and not live out the Calling, would be to cheapen the Grace.

And at the end of Scripture in Revelation 21, we’re given this wonderful vision of Hope. With beautiful images of a restored new creation.

**‘The bride of Christ comes’ - ‘God dwells with His people.’
Behold in Christ all things are made new.’**

So, this is the Big Story we proclaim. The Message of Scripture. And always the drumbeat.



The constant story of a **Faithful** God, who pours out His **Grace** and invites us to answer our sacred **Calling**, to live out God’s vision of **Truth**, in the all the arenas of our lives.

And for me, this is why I became a Christian. Because I wanted my story, to be part of this beautiful story of transformation, redemption and hope.

BUT HOW DOES ALL THIS SPEAK TO US TODAY. Individually and as Church?

How do we locate this big picture story in the small details of our lives?

Well I passionately believe, that our story is incredibly relevant for today’s broken world.

The stories by which we live our lives, shape our reality and how we make a difference to the world. We’re all very much involved in the part of the story that is still being written. As we’ve said a few times recently, ETERNITY (the age to come) IS NOW IN SESSION. Are we answering this calling of God, for a full expression of God’s kingdom justice?

As I look around, I see a world that’s becoming increasingly polarised.

I’ve been alive a fair while now, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen the world so twitchy, nervous and angry. Public discourse has degenerated into the lowest common denominator. Accusations and counter accusations with a total absence of grace.

We have leaders on the world stage, **normalising** crude and cruel language, and behaviour, that frankly wouldn’t be tolerated in the school playground. And let’s not make the mistake of thinking that the church is immune to any of these influences.

So, what I’d like to do now, is shine these beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah into our own hearts and the world around us - and then ask, what do they reveal about how we live in response to God’s calling on our lives.

Because these words are the promises of God, that reveal the qualities that God requires from His people. The qualities that Christ taught, lived and died for. And we’ll shine them a line at a time.
Verse 1

1 He will bring justice and set everything right among the nations.’ This is at the very heart of our calling. To be a light for the nations which includes speaking up and work for the cause of justice.

When you look around at public figures, who do you recognise as having this Spirit of God's 'just purposes' in their words and their actions?

2 He will not shout or raise his voice in public. Or as the Message translation puts it.
He won't call attention to what he does with loud speeches or gaudy parades.

The hallmark of God's people is a dignified humility and a quiet wisdom.

Is this the hallmark of our own lives and the character of God's church? I can think of instances recently, when public figures including Christians have drawn attention to themselves and the spirit of humility isn't the hallmark?

Who are the public figures that personify these Godly qualities?

We must remember that God says these words in Isaiah

**"I was found by people who were not looking for me.
 I showed myself to those who were not asking for me"**

God can show up in surprising people in surprising places

3 He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle.

The ways of compassion and non-violence are *clear distinctives* of those who serve God's vision for kingdom justice. Are we the Church of Christ, always advocates for the '*weakest reeds*' in society so that they're not crushed?

I think as we look around NZ Aotearoa and the world, we can see the '*flickering candle of hope*' being put out for many people, in many, different ways. But if a cynical indifference to the plight of those most in need, is accepted in any corridors of power... we as God's church can never allow this to be part of who we are.

When anyone anywhere, talks about making anything 'great' again ... what kind of 'greatness' are we talking about? And, I'm not just talking about the American president here, I'm talking about our own hearts.

Does our definition of 'greatness' align itself with the biblical definition of true greatness?

Be it great military power, great economic power, political power whatever. If it doesn't reflect the greatness of a servant heart, great compassion, or a great love for neighbour... you can call it anything you want but it isn't Christianity and it's not the desire of God. Are we as God's church, prepared to be the prophetic voice and say ... actually, this isn't 'great' and it isn't part of God's plan and design for His world?

Apathy isn't an option for God's people. And God reminds us of this with these words in verse 20

20 You see and recognize what is right - but refuse to act on it.

The Greek word for sin is '*hamartia*'... which literally means to 'miss the mark'.

Israel missed the mark of their calling to be a light for all the nations and to serve God's vision for justice. Sin is not *just* about doing 'bad things' ... it's also a 'failure of our vocation and calling' in the eyes of God. '*The good we have not done*' as our NZ prayer book confesses.

This is the beauty of Scripture. The word of God is alive and active. It penetrates soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of all our hearts. Heb 4:12

I'll conclude with these exhilarating and encouraging promises from God.

He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.

4 He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth.

I passionately believe that we have the ultimate one true story of hope.
But life is tough at times and it can take its toll on all our spirits.
Spiritual apathy can take hold of all our hearts. But our calling is clear.

**We must not lose heart - or lose the fire in our bellies
to change whatever is wrong and unjust, and to answer our calling to live out God's truth.**

We walk as a community to support each other in this privileged calling and Jesus Christ is our cornerstone and the one in whom we fix our eyes. Our inspiration is that Jesus never faltered in His commitment for God's kingdom vision purposes. And as followers of Christ, neither must we.