

## Justice For All

Exodus 23:1-9

Have you ever felt like you've received the short end of the stick, like you haven't been treated fairly?

I've felt that a few times in life. One time that stands out in my mind is when I interviewed for a position as an electrical apprentice with the IBEW.

They were only looking for a handful of new apprentices and they had a large number of applicants.

I showed up for my interview and there were around ten other guys waiting with me for their turn.

Sitting in the room it was easy to tell that most of us were a little nervous wondering what questions we would be asked and hoping to get the job.

After a while they called my name and I went into the room and seated around a rectangular table were four or five people.

A couple of them looked prepared to conduct a job interview and a couple looked like they just fell out of bed and could have cared less about being there.

After a quick introduction they proceeded with the questions.

They asked a few of the usual questions like, "Why do you want to be an electrician?" "Why do you think you would be a good fit for the job?" and some things like that.

But for most of that very short interview they asked me questions about the union and unfortunately I had never worked in a union environment and so didn't really have great answers to those questions.

After a few weeks went by I got a letter in the mail and not surprisingly I did not get the job.

Now if the letter of rejection had said that I didn't get the job because I didn't know anything about the union I would have been o.k. with that.

But that is not what the letter said.

The letter said something like, "We thank you for coming for the interview but we feel as though you don't have enough electrical knowledge to be a good fit at this time. You should consider taking some courses at Fanshawe College and then apply again in the future."

Take a wild guess how many electrical questions they asked me?  
Zero!

I couldn't help but feel it was unfair to be turned down for something that I wasn't even tested on.

I got the strong feeling that they already had the positions filled before I ever got in the room and they were just

going through the motions because they were supposed to.

The whole situation did not feel fair.

[We've probably all experienced something like that in life haven't we, because as I tell my kids all the time, "Life isn't fair!" While that is true it is also true that Christians should strive to be people of justice. While there is no question we fail at that at times which is why we so desperately the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ. Even though we are far from perfect we need to be people concerned about justice, that is to say we need to be concerned about what is right and good for everyone. Our text this morning Exodus **23:1-9** gives us some important lessons about what it means to be people of justice. Let's look at these together. Here is the first...]

**Point #1 – Justice requires a courageous commitment to truth.**

In order to promote what is right in God's sight we must resist any outside influence that would lead us away from what is good.

*The ninth commandment informs much of what is written in these first few verses (1-2).*

The Bible calls us to seek what is right and good for people and in order to do that we need to be truthful in what we say.

Sometimes that is easy and other times it is difficult.

Sometimes the difficulty comes from within us and other times the difficulty comes from outside pressure.

"Don't spread false reports" it says in verse one.

Gossip is one of the most common ways we fail at instructions like this.

There is something that our sin nature finds captivating in the words "Did you hear about...."

I can't tell you how many times I have seen the truth get twisted by gossip.

*In addition to gossip there is peer pressure.*

I find it amazing that so many people in our day think that what is right is determined by how many people think a certain way.

I regularly see on the news opinion polls about moral issues and the way it is often portrayed is that the majority opinion is right simply because it is the majority.

But look at what God says here. He says in the middle of verse 2 "...do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd."

Whenever someone says to me "the church better get with the times" I think to myself of all the times we find people in the bible going against the majority for the sake of doing what is right.

[One of my favorite examples of this are some men named Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who the Babylonians renamed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The King of Babylon decided to build a huge golden statue of himself and commanded everyone to worship the statue when the instruments played and anyone who didn't get tossed into the fiery furnace. When the music starts to play everyone is the enormous crowd bowed down but not those three men. The king gave them a chance to change their mind, but they say this instead "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." That is one of my favourite lines in the Bible. They are going to stick to what is right no matter what and if you know the story you know their faith was well placed because God does miraculously rescue them from the flames.]

We need that same kind of courage and thankfully God graciously provides it.

It is amazing to me how often we witness today someone being shamed into submission to evil.

In the time that we live it doesn't take long for an article or a video to make the rounds in cyber space.

Many times when someone who is somewhat well known says something in support of Biblical values I end up seeing it on Facebook or in an email.

But then a wave of criticism and viciousness comes their way, sometimes their livelihood is threatened in some way and often after that happens the person will issue an apology, they will bend to the will of the crowd.

When that happens the pursuit of true justice is lost.

[Rumors are untrustworthy and should not be repeated and the crowd is often wrong. True justice is based on the objective truth that God has revealed to us and even if we have to stand alone it is far better to stand with the LORD. Here is another important aspect of being people who stand for what is right. We need to keep in mind that...]

### **Point #2 – Justice is independent of personal feelings.**

When our perception of what is right bends on account who we like or don't like we lose sight of justice.

Two kinds of people are in view in verses 3-4, we meet the first in verse 3.

That is a tough one isn't it.

If you have a rich man and a poor man involved in a legal dispute don't you want to root for the poor man?

I think to one degree or another most of us have been effected by the Robin Hood effect.

What is Robin Hood famous for? Stealing from the rich and giving to the poor and he is painted in the light of a hero.

People tend to think that since rich people have so much it is no problem if they incur some loss.

While that may be true from a dollars and cents perspective it is not true from a justice perspective.

It is right to feel empathy for the poor! We should care about that, but we shouldn't look the other way when they do something wrong simply because they are poor.

We shouldn't ignore what is right for the sake of pity.

*A second kind of person is mentioned in verses 4-5 and this one really makes the point about what is right being independent of our feelings.*

This is the positive side of the sixth commandment.

God asks His people to do more than simply not murder, He also intends for us to seek the good of others even people who don't like us people who would be considered our enemies.

This goes directly against how we would naturally feel doesn't it.

The natural response to seeing a wondering ox or are trapped donkey of someone who hates us is to say, "Serves him/her right" and walk on by.

Go against that feeling, it says here, and do what is right.

[I've learned that lesson over the years. I've had people curse and yell at me, speak hateful lies about me, and then ask me for help. Everything in me wanted to tell them to get lost and never call me again, but I knew full well that my feeling were not the rule the day so I went to help.]

Don't misunderstand here, the Bible never says that feeling have no part in our lives.

We are commanded to rejoice, weep, love, be angry without sinning, and more.

Feelings are important, but we need to recognize that they can be deceptive.

Jeremiah points this out when he says, **"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"** (Jeremiah 17:9).

True justice depends on sticking with what is right regardless of how we may feel.

Otherwise we will excuse the poor behavior of people we like and be overly harsh with those we don't.

Imagine for a moment a person who has hurt you deeply in your life and would hurt you again if they were given the chance.

Imagine they were on trial for committing a crime and you had clear proof that they were innocent.

Would you present the proof or let them go to jail?

What if you were driving somewhere and saw that person on the side of the road with a broken down care, would you stop and call a tow truck for them?

[As Christians we ought to be clear on the human condition. We understand that our feelings can lead us in the wrong direction. We should know our need of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit to turn our hearts towards what is right and good. Listen, true justice will never be enjoyed in this world through human wisdom or power. It will come through the renewing of our minds by the Word of God and the rule of Christ which we should all long for. It is Christ who can give us courage, it is Christ Who can rightly order our feeling, and it is Christ Who can help us treat people as these next few verses call us to. There we see one last lesson about being a just people. It is this...]

**Point #3 – Justice remains the same regardless of position or temptation.**

The truth is consistent whether someone is rich and powerful or among the poorest of the poor.

*Do you ever feel like sometimes the justice system that we know in our culture is one way for wealthy people and another way for poor people?*

According to God’s word it’s not supposed to be that way (**Verses 6-9**).

We saw in verse 3 that the poor are not to be shown favouritism and here we see that they are not to be denied justice either.

For as long as people have had legal disputes there have been people who try and cheat the system.

In verse 8 the people are warned against one of the things that people do to try and avoid justice.

It says there to “do not accept a bribe.”

A rich person would come to a judge and say, “I’ll give you a whole bunch of money if you decide in my favour.”

What could a poor person or an innocent person do if a judge or the witnesses accepted money to rule against him?

He couldn't do anything and so he would lose the case, but worse than that justice would be lost among God's people.

[Have you heard the Bible account of a man name Naboth. Naboth owned a vineyard that King Ahab wanted to buy to turn into a vegetable garden. Naboth refused because the land was his inheritance passed down to him from his ancestors. This made Ahab very sad, but his wife Jezebel told him to cheer up because she would get vineyard for him. She planned a get together and invited Naboth hired some scoundrels to say that he committed some terrible crimes and then have him stoned to death. And that is what happened and it happened because people with no integrity treasured money above what is right.]

I've heard people say from time to time that, "Everyone has a price."

What they mean is that if you offer someone enough money you can get them to do whatever you want.

Christians should have no price!

God's people have already been bought with the precious blood of Christ which is more valuable than anything else we could be offered.

When the preciousness of Jesus is clear in your mind and the great delight of your soul, then no one could bribe or tempt you into doing something wrong.

While the court room is what is mainly in view here, this extends to all of life.

It is easy to fall into the trap of playing favourites.

To treat those with money differently than those without.

To be kind to those we know and indifferent or uncaring towards a stranger.

God calls us to something better as believers.

He calls us to be people who treasure what is right and good.

To be people who love justice.

To be people of integrity no matter what.

By God's grace we can be people of justice.

By God's grace we can be people of courage!

By God's grace we can be people who do what is right even when our feelings are trying to push us in the opposite direction.

And by God's grace we can treat people fairly regardless of who they are or what they can do for us.

If justice is to be found anywhere it must be found in the church.