



Justice

Script References

Introduction

00:00-0:27

Jon: If you were a praying mantis, it would be socially acceptable to devour your mate.

Tim: And if you're a honey badger, you have no regard for other animals. You don't care.

Jon: If you're a panda with twins, it's normal to abandon one to take care of the other.

Tim: But if humans do any of these things, we would call it wrong, unfair, or unjust.

Jon: Yeah. Why is that? Why do humans care so much about justice?

Justice and Humanity

00:28-01:22

Tim: Well, the Bible has a fascinating response to that question. On page one, humans are set apart from all other creatures as the image of God.

Jon: Yeah. God's representatives who rule the world by his definition of good and evil.

Tim: And this identity, it's the bedrock of the Bible's view of justice: all humans are equal before God and have the right to be treated with dignity and fairness, no matter who you are.¹

1. Genesis 1:27

Jon: And that would be nice if we all did that, but we know how the world really works.

Tim: And the Bible addresses that too. It shows how we are constantly redefining good and evil to our own advantage at the expense of others.

Jon: Yeah, self-preservation. And the weaker someone is, the easier it is to take advantage of them.

Tim: And so in the biblical story, we see this happening on a personal level but also in families, and then in communities, and in whole civilizations that create injustice, especially towards the vulnerable.

Tim: But the story doesn't end there. Out of this whole mess, God chose a man named Abraham to start a new kind of family.² Specifically, Abraham was to teach his family to "keep the way of the Lord, by doing righteousness and justice."³

2. Genesis 12

3. Genesis 18:18-29

Justice in Scripture

01:22-03:20

Jon: Yeah. Doing righteousness? That's a Bible word I don't really use, but what comes to mind is being a good person.

Tim: But what does that even mean, "being good?" The biblical Hebrew word for righteousness is "*tsedeqah*," and it's more specific. It's an ethical standard that refers to right relationships between people. It's about treating others as the image of God.

Jon: With the God-given dignity they deserve.

Tim: And this word "justice," it's the Hebrew word "*mishpat*." It can refer to retributive justice.⁴

4. Deuteronomy 25:1

Jon: Like if I steal something, I pay the consequences.

Tim: Exactly. Yet most often in the Bible, *mishpat* refers to restorative justice. It means going a step further, actually seeking out vulnerable people who are being taken advantage of and helping them.⁵

5. Zechariah 7:9-10

Jon: Yeah. Some people call this charity.

Tim: But *mishpat* involves way more. It means taking steps to advocate for the vulnerable and changing social structures to prevent injustice.

Jon: So justice and righteousness are about a radical, selfless way of life.

Tim: Yeah, and you find this idea all over the Bible. Like here in the book of Proverbs. What does it mean to bring about just righteousness?⁶

6. Proverbs 31:8-9

Jon: "Open your mouth for those who can't speak for themselves."

Tim: And what do these words mean for the prophets like Jeremiah?

Jon: "Rescue the disadvantaged, and don't tolerate oppression or violence against the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow."⁷

7. Jeremiah 22:3

Tim: And like here, look in the book of Psalms.

Jon: “The Lord God upholds justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, and sets the prisoner free, but he thwarts the way of the wicked.”
Woah. He thwarts the wicked? ⁸

8. Psalm 146:7-9

Tim: Yeah. In Hebrew the word wicked is "*rasha*." It means “guilty” or “in the wrong.” It refers to someone who mistreats another human, ignoring their dignity as an image of God.

God’s Response to Injustice

03:20-05:48

Jon: So justice and righteousness is a big deal to God?

Tim: Yes. It’s what Abraham’s family, the Israelites, were to be all about. They ended up as immigrant slaves being oppressed unjustly in Egypt. And so God confronted Egypt’s evil, declaring them to be *rasha*’, guilty of injustice, and so he rescued Israel. But the tragic irony of the Old Testament story is that these redeemed people went on to commit the same acts of injustice against the vulnerable. And so God sent prophets who declared Israel guilty.

Jon: But they weren’t the only ones. There’s injustice everywhere.

Tim: Yeah. Some people actively perpetuate injustice. Others receive benefits or privileges from unjust social structures they take for granted. And sadly, history has shown that when the oppressed gain power, they often become oppressors themselves.

Jon: So we all participate in injustice, actively or passively, even unintentionally. We’re all the guilty ones.

Tim: And so this is the surprising message of the biblical story. God’s response to humanity’s legacy of injustice is to give us a gift: the life of Jesus. He did righteousness and justice, and yet he died on behalf of the guilty. But then God declared Jesus to be the righteous one when he rose from the dead. And so now Jesus offers his life to the guilty, so that they too can be declared righteous before God—not because of anything they’ve done but because of what Jesus did for them.⁹

9. Luke 14:12-14,
Luke 11:42

Jon: The earliest followers of Jesus experienced this righteousness from God not just as a new status but as a power that changed their lives and compelled them to act in surprising new ways.

Tim: Yeah. If God declared someone righteous when they didn’t deserve it, the only reasonable response is to go and seek righteousness and justice for others.

Jon: This is a radical way of life, and it's not always convenient or easy. It's courageously making other people's problems my problems.

Tim: This is what Jesus meant by loving your neighbor as yourself. It's about a lifetime commitment fueled by the words of the ancient prophet Micah. "God has told you humans what is good and what the Lord requires of you. It's to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." ¹⁰

10. Micah 6:8