Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out World
Sermon Title: Justice for All

Text: Proverbs 19:28 -- A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity; Proverbs 21:15 -- When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers; Proverbs 28:5 – Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely; Proverbs 29:26 -- Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice.

Introduction: This morning, I want to talk about a topic that is mentioned throughout Scripture. Most of us were introduced to it, if not sooner by our parents, when we first entered school and learned **the Pledge of Allegiance**. Do you remember how it goes? ***If you do, say it with me***. **I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and JUSTICE for all**. The pledge mentions four defining characteristics of our country that our educators and leaders felt were so important that they earnestly attempted to pass them on to each succeeding generation. (**1**) as a nation we recognize that God is our ultimate authority; (**2**) we are one nation that must not be divided; (**3**) people must be free to make their own choices; and (**4**) without justice for all, **the first three will most certainly go by the wayside**. The British statesman and prime minister, **William Gladstone**, understood this. That's why he said, "**National injustice is the surest road to national downfall**." Before we start looking at what the Bible says about justice, let's define it. **Justice is the equitable** (fair and impartial) **application of moral standards to everyone** (Holman O. T. Commentary, Anders, p. 255).

Why have I chosen to preach on justice? Well, here's what I've discovered about myself and most other people. ***We tend to believe that justice is a good thing for everyone until we are on the receiving end of it. Then we want mercy and grace***. **Dave Hagler**, a former referee and umpire, has the ultimate story of justice. "**I was driving too fast in the snow in Boulder, Colorado**," he writes in an *LA Times* story, "**and a policeman pulled me over and gave me a speeding ticket. I tried to talk him out of it, telling him how worried I was about insurance, what a good driver I am, and so on. He told me if I didn't like it, I could go to court. The first game of the next baseball season, I'm umpiring behind home plate, and the first batter up is the same policeman. I recognize him; he recognizes me. He asks me, 'How did the thing with the ticket go?' I tell him, 'Swing at everything**.'" When the scales of justice tip in our favor, we tend to be the greatest advocates for it. But let them tip the other way, and well **… So, what does the Bible have to say about justice**? Here are some preliminary thoughts from several different passages. Let's start with this.

God is just. **He always does what is right**. (**Deuteronomy 10:17-18 -- For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing**; **Psalm 89:14 -- Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you**; **2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 – God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well**).

God's laws are just. **He never commands His people to act in a way that is not in keeping with His character**. (**Nehemiah 9:13 -- Then You came down on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments** --NASB; **Romans 7:12 -- So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just and good** – Holman Christian Standard Bible). **Everything that God commands us to do is based on His justice.**

God loves people who are just. He promises to be with them always. (**Psalm 37:28 -- For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones**; **Psalm 11:7 -- For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; upright men** (those who do what is just) **will see his face**. **If you earnestly desire fellowship with God, always be on the side of justice.**

God blesses people whose LEADERS are just. He condemns wicked rulers but He blesses those WHOSE LEADERS do not show partiality. (**Deuteronomy 16:18-20 -- Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept**

a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you; 2 Samuel 23:3-4 -- When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth). **Contrast this with what God says about wicked rulers** – **Isaiah 10:1-3 -- Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, 2 to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the ruin that will come from afar**? **Leaders who govern with the intent of furthering their own selfish interests can look forward to God's judgment.**

So, here's what we know so far about justice which we have defined as the equitable application of moral standards to everyone. **God is just**. He always does the right thing. **God's laws are just**. They always exhort us to do the right thing. **God loves people who are just**. He promises to be with them. And, **God blesses people whose leaders are just** (who do not put themselves before others).

Now let's take a closer look at what Solomon says in Proverbs and a few other passages about justice and its application.

We're instructed to give justice to the innocent (**Proverbs 18:5 -- It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the righteous** – innocent -- **of justice**). Now, we all know that in one sense, there are no truly innocent people in this world. The Bible affirms this in **Romans 3:10-12 -- There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one**. **But we understand that Solomon is talking about those people who do the right thing in a particular situation, yet suffer injustice anyway. I think of Jeremiah the prophet**. Are you familiar with his story? In **Jeremiah 38**, we witness his **unwavering commitment to speak the truth and his refusal to compromise his divine commission**. Despite the serious risks he faced, Jeremiah courageously warned the people of Jerusalem about the impending destruction of their city by the Babylonian forces. It turns out that the people didn't quite take to his message. "**Jeremiah should be put to death because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the well-being of this people, but rather their harm**." **– Jeremiah 38:4**. These words, spoken by certain officials who conspired against Jeremiah, reflect their unwillingness to heed God's warning. They falsely accused Jeremiah of treason, claiming that his warnings were demoralizing the soldiers and the people. **They intended to silence the prophet and maintain the illusion of security within the city walls**. In an act of extreme cruelty, these conspirators took it upon themselves to **throw Jeremiah into a cistern, leaving him to perish in the mud**. This malicious attempt to suppress the truth and stifle the prophet's voice **demonstrates the lengths to which some were willing to go in order to their own interests and maintain their power and control**.

If you think this kind of thing only happened in ancient times, you're wrong. It's happening today. Listen to this: Hostility against churches in the United States appears to be on the rise, according to a recent **Family Research Council report** that identified **436 incidents against churches in 2023**, more than DOUBLE the amount reported by the group in **2022** and EIGHT TIMES the number identified in **2018**. WHAT'S CAUSING THIS INCREASED HOSTILITY TOWARD CHRISTIANS? The **President of the Family Research Council** says this, "**There is a common connection between the growing religious persecution abroad and the rapidly increasing hostility toward churches here at home: (HE ARGUES THAT THE COMMON THREAD BETWEEN THE TWO – are you ready for this – IS) OUR GOVERNMENT POLICIES. The indifference abroad to the fundamental freedom of religion is rivaled only by the increasing antagonism toward the moral absolutes taught by Bible-believing churches here in the U.S., which is fomenting this environment of hostility toward churches**." I wish our government recognized that Christians make good citizens. **We pay our taxes** (**Matthew 22:21**), **we pray for our leaders** (**1 Timothy 2:1-2**), **we promote peace** (**Romans 14:19**) and **we do good to all men** (**Galatians 6:10**). You would think that it would be in the best interest of our country to encourage people to consider following Christ. **However, what we're discovering is that those**

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who hold to the truths in God's Word as part of our constitutional right to freedom of religion are finding ourselves in conflict with a growing number of our nation's leaders and losing our protections as a result. **THIS IS NOT JUSTICE FOR THE INNOCENT**. How are we as Christians to respond to this kind of treatment? We're to remember two things: (**1**) **1 Peter 2:19-20 -- For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. This is telling us that we're to put up with injustice and trust that God will work it all out for our good in the end; (2) Proverbs 29:26 -- Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice. Never forget that sooner or later, God will bring about His justice for us!**

We're to give justice to the oppressed (**Proverbs 14:31 -- Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him; Proverbs 22:16 -- He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich — both come to poverty; Proverbs 22:22-23 -- Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, 23 for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them**). The word **oppress** means to ***keep (someone) in subservience and hardship, especially by the unjust exercise of authority***. In Proverbs, the oppressed are those who are poor, weak, and afflicted. **They have by no fault of their own suffered hardship at the hands of someone else**. For many, it is very difficult to overcome oppression. **The very people who could help them get out of poverty seem to be committed to keeping them in it**.

And, of course, there are some people who are oppressed today by no fault of their own, but simply because of their ethnic origin, socioeconomic or marital status, or skin color. **Here's an obvious example**. For most homeowners in a hot housing market, the value of their property tends to rise dramatically. But not for **Carlette Duffy**. Her home seemed not to rise in value much at all, and Duffy couldn't find a satisfactory explanation--that is until the answer was too obvious to ignore. Duffy was looking to borrow against its equity when she got an appraisal for her home. She was surprised when the appraised amount was **$125,000**, which seemed low compared to the findings she'd seen anecdotally from other friends and family. So, she had another appraisal done, and the second came out at just **$110,000**. Nagged by her suspicions that the lowball offers were because she was **African-American**, Duffy again got a third appraisal. **But this time, she took pains not to reveal her racial identity, by corresponding via email and asking a friend's white husband to stand in during the appraiser's visit to the home**. That appraisal came back at **$259,000**--more than double the original amount. The rep who conducted the second appraisal claimed that his work was driven by relevant data. However, according to **Andre Perry**, a researcher who studies housing discrimination, that explanation fails to account for the history of institutional racism in real estate. I KNOW THAT'S NOT A POPULAR PHRASE, BUT WE HAVE TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT SOME PEOPLE SUFFER HARDSHIP SIMPLY DUE TO THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN. Perry said, "**It's almost when people see Black neighborhoods, they see twice as much crime than there actually is. They see worse education than there actually is. I think this is what happens when appraisers, lenders, and real estate agents see Blackness. They devalue the asset. They devalue the property**."

God has always looked out for the poor, the needy, the oppressed. In **Deuteronomy 24:14-15**, He commanded that a day laborer would be paid at the end of the day because he was counting on his wages to purchase food for him and his family. **Further**, when one Israelite loaned money to another Jew, he was not to charge interest because that would make it very difficult to repay the loan and eventually lead him into poverty (**Exodus 22:25**). **Amos 5:11** tells us that the rich in Israel were trampling the poor by exacting taxes of grain that kept them having enough food. That's when God stepped in and said this in **Amos 8:9-10 -- In that day** (the day of retribution), **declares the Sovereign Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. 10 I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day**.

We're to give justice to the alien (**Exodus 22:21-22 -- You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt;**

Deuteronomy 27:19 -- Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner). A sojourner was someone who happened to come from another place to Israel. They were not to be mistreated because they were not Jews. Instead, God instructs that they should be treated with the same love and respect as their fellow Israelites.

As Christians, we recognize that everyone is of equal value because all people are made in the image of God. This means that we need to care about and seek justice for those who are **innocent**, those who are **oppressed by no fault of their own**, and those who are **despised because of their race or ethnic origin**.

Now let me wrap this message up with four ways to apply this message to your life:

- **Pray for America** – **As a country, we need to repent and get right with God**. **Proverbs 14:34** says, "**Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people**." When we seek to do what is right in God's eyes, He leads us in the RIGHT PATHS (**4:11**) and teaches us the RIGHT THINGS (**8:6**). Our hearts and minds are filled with the RIGHT THOUGHTS (**12:5**) and our lips speak the RIGHT WORDS (**23:16**). Imagine what this country would be like if we collectively sought to do what is right in the eyes of God.
- **Do what you can to help the poor** – God has a special concern for the poor and needy, and if we exploit them, we will find ourselves fighting against the Lord (**Proverbs 14:31 -- He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker but whoever is kind to the needy honors God**). It was **President Ronald Reagan** who said, "**None of us can help everyone. But all of us can help someone. And when we help them, we serve Jesus. Who would want to miss a chance to do that**?"
- **Be honest in all your dealings** – **Proverbs 16:11 -- Honest scales and balances are from the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making**. In ancient times, unscrupulous men would change the weight in a bag that was placed on one side of a scale, so that whatever was being sold would appear to be heavier than it actually was on the other side. When it comes to any business dealing, we need to be absolutely above reproach in how we deal with our customers. Just because you can deceive someone into paying more for less, doesn't mean that you should.
- **Consider both sides of matter** – **Proverbs 18:17 -- The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him**. Listen to both sides of a conflict before you make any kind of judgment or decide what is just and fair. You might end up seeing it very differently when you do.

Conclusion: Justice is an important matter this side of heaven. We all want it. And I hope that after this message, you will take scripture to heart and try to administer it to others at every opportunity. But what about on the other side? The story is told of a monk in the male counterpart to Mother Theresa's order who came to see the saintly leader. He said, "**Mother Theresa, one of my colleagues is spreading things about me that are untrue. I demand justice**!" Without missing a beat, Mother Theresa replied, "**Oh, just forget it. Think of what he would say if he knew the truth**." She was right of course. There is not a person alive who, if his innermost thoughts were made public, would not deserve capital punishment ten times over. It turns out that the brother in Mother Theresa's order did not really want justice. What he wanted was mercy. Aren't you glad that when it comes to eternity, God does not give us justice, but grace and mercy? If we were to receive justice for our deeds, we would all go to Hell. But instead, God extends the offer of salvation through His Son and says to us, "**I know you're a sinner. That you have failed me many times. But because I love you, I choose to send my Son to pay the penalty for your offenses, the just for the unjust, so that you can be reconciled to me and have life with me forever**." Justice is important, but when it comes to the Christian life, mercy and grace matter more. Have you placed your trust in Christ and received the free gift of eternal life in Him? To do so, you must repent of your sin and believe in Him. You can do that right now.