

### ***“The Ripple Effect—Because Justice Matters”***

Today we continue the series we've been in for a couple of weeks now called “The Ripple Effect.” The idea is that God has some core characteristics. We can know what those are by looking at the Old Testament. But we get an even clearer picture of those characteristics when we look at Jesus. When we chose to follow Jesus, we're choosing to let those characteristics become a part of us, and when other people see them in us, they might take them on too, and so on. When we live out God's characteristics in the world, the world begins to look more like it should.

Now the characteristics we're talking about are things like compassion, like love, like generosity, like justice. In fact, that's what we're going to focus in on today justice.

When it comes to this characteristic of God we're talking about God's deep concern for people who are oppressed, abused, marginalized. We're talking about God's anger when people are treated as objects, when people are used, when people are depersonalized.

**So what is justice?** Sometimes we confuse injustice with inconvenience. We cry out for justice when somebody cuts in line in front of at the movie theater. We cry out for justice when we go through the drive through only to find out they gave us Diet Coke instead of regular. We cry out for justice when our kid didn't the coach we wanted for them. We cry out for justice when we have to wait too long at the doctor's office, or at the DMV. I think it's important to understand that these aren't really issues of justice, they're issues of inconvenience. In our culture where most of us are so pampered, it's easy to confuse inconvenience and justice. If we're going to follow Jesus we really do need to learn the difference. Jesus didn't call people to follow him and have convenient lives. He called them to much, much more.

Sometimes we confuse injustice with unfairness. Kids vocalize this more than adults, but we adults think it just as much. “She got more tater tots than I did, it's not fair! How come he gets to stay up later than me? It's not fair! She got that promotion when I should of! He gets all the perks. They always get better deals. It's not fair!”

Life isn't fair. It just isn't. When it comes to the small stuff, we just need to get used to it. And, yes, sometimes we need to point out unfairness and try to correct it in these situations. But let's not confuse minor unfairness with injustice.

Brining justice to injustice is much bigger, and much more involved. Oh, and let's not confuse mercy and justice. Both are very important but mercy and justice are different. Think of it this way. You're walking alongside a river one day, and out of the corner of your eye you see a baby floating down the river. What do you do? You jump in and rescue the baby, right? You get him on to the shore safe and sound and you're elated that you saved that kid, and you should be. But then you hear squeal from the river and see another baby floating down. What do you do? You jump in and rescue that baby too! Then it happens again, and again. Swimming out and saving the babies is mercy in action. Meeting the immediate needs.

But justice is asking the question, “**Why** are babies floating down this river? And what can I do to stop it?” Justice lived out gets at the heart of why people are suffering, and attacks the problem at its source.

Now when it comes to issues of justice, honestly, I want to put these on. These are blinders, or blinkers, for a horse. They're used to cover part of the field of vision of the horse. When the horse is wearing these, it can't see everything. And sometimes we put something like this on when it comes to injustices in our world.

A specific example close to home that I think crosses the line into injustice is title loan companies. I know they serve a purpose in some ways, but they are predatory. A CNN article says this, “Car title lenders are in a different category than credit card companies or banks and work around usury laws. Thus, title loan lenders are able to charge triple digit annual percentage rates (APRs). Yes, triple digits. It's not an exaggeration to see 250% APR and higher on these car tile loans and only a handful of states have passed strict laws that prohibit exorbitant percentage rates.”

I know two people who have lost their cars this way. A few years ago a friend lost his car thinking he could take out a title loan and juggle a few bills. Within hours of missing a payment, they came and took his car. The Consumer Federation of America and The Center For Responsible Lending call them predatory. These places might fill some sort of need, but when they are clearly targeting people who often don't know what all their options are, people who don't have much of a voice to cry out. They're charging rates that our simply outlandish, that is predatory. And it's wrong. It's an injustice.

These are the sorts of things where we have to take off our blinders and see what's really going on. And even if most of us don't use these businesses we need to speak out against them. Some people might say that title loans are on the border of being places of injustice, but other things other things have crossed the line even further.

I recently found out that almost 70% of the chocolate we eat and love comes for the from countries on the west coast of Africa—that's where the cocoa pods are harvested, and until recently a very large portion that cocoa was harvested by slave labor. Some of those considered slaves were simply born onto the cocoa groves, some people were stolen from other countries as children, some sold by their parents.

This isn't about boycotting chocolate producers or feeling guilty about eating chocolate, it's about being aware, taking off the blinder, and holding corporations responsible for their products and their actions. It's about us being willing to pay more for products that are purchased for a fair wage that are produced without slave labor.

There is a movement to hold chocolate companies like Cadbury, and Kraft, Hershey, Mars, Nestle and others accountable for how they acquire their cocoa, but half-or more of the chocolate we eat was harvest by people many children, who were bought and sold, or stolen and who are being worked to death as human tools with no regard for their living conditions, health, or dignity. It's time to take off the blinders. The chocolate we enjoy doesn't come from Oompa Loompas. Much of it harvest by people, oftentimes, children who are enslaved.

Slavery, or human trafficking isn't just about chocolate. It gets worse. I'd rather not even talk about this to be honest because it is so repulsive to me, but I need to take my blinders off. And you do too if you call yourself a follower of Jesus. One of the worst evils in our world right now, one of the fastest growing evils in our world right now, is sex trafficking. Primarily women and children, bought and sold to be sex slaves. According to the U.S. State Department an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 children, women and men are abducted and trafficked across international borders annually. Approximately 80% of those trafficking victims are women and girls. It's a \$32 billion a year market, second only to drugs in illegal activity. And the only exit for most of these women and children is death.

According to International Justice Mission, **"Sex trafficking is a global enterprise driven by deception, coercion and force. Traffickers transport or detain victims for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. This trade in rape for profit thrives in the absence of robust law enforcement to ensure the protection of the law for vulnerable children and women."**

International Justice Mission is one of the leaders in the fight against human trafficking.

Let me tell you one specific story from IJM. Her name is Jyoti—a beautiful 14 year old girl who comes from a really poor family in India. One day, four women come to her village and say, "Jyoti, come with us. We'll take you to the city. We'll get you a good job. You can make a lot of money, and then you can send that money back to feed your family." So Jyoti, wanting to feed her family, goes with them. On the way to the city, they offer her tea that is drugged. She falls unconscious, and then the next thing she knows, she wakes up and she is in the red-light district being sold into a brothel for \$250.

They take Jyoti down into a basement, and for the next three days, they beat her with electric cords, plastic pipes, and metal rods. They beat girls like this to tell them, "You are hopeless. You are powerless, and you are helpless against your oppressors." After she is beaten, Jyoti is taken and she is forced to service 30 men a day for seven days a week, and these numbers are not exaggerations. She never sees the outside of that brothel. That's her life. She's 14.

You can hear a story like that and it can get your heart pumping. It can get your emotions flowing and that's OK. It makes me want to get some of my big old corn fed friends, hop on plane and open up few cans of...on the people who would this to kids. But this isn't just about emotions. It's about a mandate from God that we do something. It's important that we know this when our emotions fade as they are prone to do.

Let's let scripture guide us here. The prophet Micah speaking for God says, "**He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God**" Micah 6:8. Notice the word "require", is in there. God doesn't suggest that we act justly; God doesn't recommend that we do something about injustice. God requires it of us. Do something!

The first time Jesus stood up to speak to people he took a passage out of Isaiah, a prophecy, and claimed his mission. "**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...**" (Luke 4:18). Jesus' mission becomes our mission, right?

The wisdom of Proverbs points to God's heart. The writer tell us, "**Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy**" (Proverbs 31:8-9). And even more directly, "**Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?"** (Proverbs 24:11-12).

In Isaiah 58, if you look at that whole chapter God basically says to us, "You know you can have a great church service. You can have great preaching, great music, great prayer meetings, great Bible study, great programs, but it means nothing to me, in fact, it is detestable to me, if your love and your faith don't go public in the form of justice." Make no mistake...God is passionate about justice.

And that leads to the question we're all thinking, "What can I do?" What can we do in Joplin, MO? There are three things we can do right here in Joplin, **Educate, Explore, Engage**. The first step in the process of justice is *education*. Just learn about what's going on in our world. Keep your eyes open. Don't look away when there is an issue of justice on TV or in a magazine, or on your homepage. Educate yourself about the companies that you do business with. Take the time to look at their corporate statements and justice policies and practices.

The second step is *exploration*. Go and visit [www.IJM.org](http://www.IJM.org), and just look around for a practical next step to be involved. You can also visit our local Rapha house on Main Street, 118 Main. That's another international ministry whose mission is to provide safe-houses and after care for those rescued from human trafficking. You can visit there and walk through and see the stories of people who've been set free and explore what you might be able to do about it. I know that you don't want to go there and see, but do it anyway. Take the blinders off.

The third step is *engagement*, and this is where you influence, give and go. You look at the corporate conduct of the places you do business, you write letters and send emails holding companies accountable, whether that's companies that produce chocolate, or diamonds, or rugs, or clothing. We make choices about how we spend our money, where we spend our money, and if can, buy fair market products, products where farmers or artisans are given a fair wage for their labor, we do that. When choose to make small sacrifices in order to fuel organizations like IJM. How many soft drinks or cups of coffee would you have to go without in a month do give \$10 a month to IJM? Not very many. We find small ways to engage.

Janet and I are now partners with IJM and make a monthly gift over and above our tithe to the church. We want to do something and are willing to give up something small in order to be a part of something big. For those people you know who have everything, give a gift to IJM on their behalf for their birthday, or anniversary, or Christmas. And of course we engage through our prayers. Make these issues, justice issues, a regular part of your prayer life, your family's prayer life.

Whatever you do, please, please, don't put these on. Here in Joplin, these issues might seem so far away that we can't do anything about it, but even then, here in Joplin, we can still **educate** ourselves and others, **explore** what's happening in organizations like International Justice Mission, and we can **engage** at least a little bit through IJM or Rapha house.

Let's put the ripple effect into play when it comes to this characteristic of God called justice. God said through the prophet Amos, **"Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24).**

Let's go back to Jyoti, the 14 year old from India stolen and forced to be a sex slave. IJM finds out about her and liberates her. She is no longer being horrifically abused day after day inside a brothel. IJM was able to gather evidence, infiltrate that brothel, raid that brothel, and get her out. They were able to get Jyoti in a place of long-term Christian aftercare where she got counseling. Eventually, she came to know Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She became so empowered by that experience that this young girl, horrifically abused in this nightmare, she went back to IJM and said, "I want to go back. I want to go back because I know where other children are being held. So let's go raid another brothel and get them out."

So this teenage girl leads a police raid with IJM to rescue seven more girls who were being horrifically abused. One of the girls that they rescued was a girl named Kalindi. Kalindi said to them, "I know where there are more." So Kalindi led IJM on a third raid that rescued 24 more children out of this underground dungeon where they were living the most abject and dark nightmare you can imagine. Isn't that awesome? That day when they were rescued, these kids were rescued out of the living hell and placed in long-term Christian after care where they could experience the love of God in a very tangible way, and their future, their precious future could begin. This amazing ripple of hope starts when the power of the gospel sinks in and we can be a part of it.

Let's decide to see the things, the people, the evil and the hope that so often we fail to see. Let's let God's justice roll through us, into others. Let's let God's justice influence our decisions, what we buy, what we sell, how we see, how we spend. I challenge myself and you to let God's justice ripple through us and change the world. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.