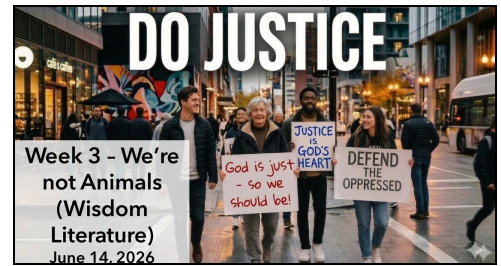


Do Justice (Week 3) - We're Not Animals (O.T. Wisdom Literature)  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**



1. As we make our way through the canon of scripture on our "journey of justice," don't be surprised if you feel stretched or challenged by what you hear. But when you feel that, hear it as a divine summons or call, a holy invitation to think differently, bigger, and better about "justice" instead of settling for the low bar we so often set.
2. The section of scripture in view yesterday was "The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament," and specifically Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It's important to remember that the moral principles in the Mosaic Law (discussed during last week's sermon) are never countermanded or contradicted by the rest of scripture. But the other parts of the Bible do continue to build on that foundation. Our focus yesterday was on three real world observations made about justice in the Wisdom Literature...
3. First, we read in [Eccl. 3.16-18](#) that God tests and weighs people, communities, and nations when we muddle and mix wickedness and justice so that we'll see that by abandoning justice we're also abandoning our humanity. Jewish biblical scholar and translator Robert Alter puts it this way: "In biblical thought, humans are uniquely tasked with being the image-bearers of God—which means principally acting as just, compassionate caretakers of the world and each other...If society operates purely on the law of the jungle—where the powerful devour the weak—then humanity has effectively surrendered its divine calling. God's test in Eccl. 3.18 is meant to expose that reality; God is confronting our human self-delusion. By abandoning justice and God's moral law, we become no different from wild beasts."
4. When we live as if might makes right, when it's the survival of the fittest, when we will do whatever it takes to get whatever no matter the cost to others, when justice sounds only like punishment and revenge, and when we fear and exploit others...that's subhuman, it's human beings laying aside God's image and behaving like mere animals.
5. So if we are committed to "doing justice" (Micah 6.8), then according to Eccl. 3.6-18 that would that a) we reject and resist all language, voices, leaders, etc. that is subhuman, that is, it makes us more beasts than image bearers, and b) we would hold dear that as we become more committed to justice in all its forms, we are also becoming more truly human.
6. A second observation about justice can be found in Proverbs 21.15, "When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but dismay to evildoers." In short, justice is not universally-agreeable; it is divisive. The greater our commitment to justice, the more pushback we might receive.
7. Proverbs 28.5 goes a level deeper: "The evil do not understand justice but those who seek the Lord understand it completely." The Reformer John Calvin contended that human wisdom has two halves: knowledge of self and knowledge of God, and in fact, you can't really know yourself without knowing God. Justice, it seems, works the same way. To learn justice requires enough humility to seek God and admit that we can't figure justice out on our own.

8. A third and final observation about justice in the Wisdom Literature can be found in a number of proverbs ([16.12](#), [29.4](#), [29.14](#), for example). In short, political, legal, economic, and religious leaders committed to justice bring stability, security, and peace to their nation. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says it like this, "Proverbs reminds us that the test of a society is how it treats those who have no power. Wealth is a trust, not a possession. To ignore the cry of the poor is to fail the most basic test of wisdom, which is to see the image of God in the person who has nothing to give you in return... Justice is more than a moral luxury. It is the prerequisite of a free society... Injustice creates a fracture in the structural integrity of the human world, a crack that will eventually cause the grandest edifice to fall."

9. So, biblically speaking, justice is not an option or extra that a stable country can choose to enjoy or not. No, justice is the very thing that makes stability and peace possible to begin with. The fruit of justice for any people is stability and longevity; without justice, there is no sure footing in the present nor in the future.

10. So if we are to "do justice," then we would understand that there is a direct causal link between justice and sustained wellbeing for any group, church, community, or country. We would measure "success" not by gross domestic product, the stock market, military might, etc. but by an increasing commitment to and expansion of justice.

### **Justice in the Wisdom Literature this Week**

Remember from the first week of this sermon series that in the Old Testament "justice" and "righteousness" are closely related terms...justice results in righteousness, that is, good character and right relationships. Do some reading this week in Proverbs on both justice and righteousness:

- [BibleGateway - Keyword Search: just](#)
- [BibleGateway - Keyword Search: righteousness](#)
- [BibleGateway - Keyword Search: righteous](#)

Reread and pray through "the Psalm of Liberation" (Psalm 146) that started our worship service yesterday. Do it a few times this week. Pray it for our church, our country, and for people you know. After all, Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible...[Psalm 146 NRSVUE - Psalm 146 Praise for God's Help](#)

Want to learn a little more about "The Wisdom Literature" of the Old Testament? Here are brief introductory videos (each 3-6 min. in length) on Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes:

- [The Book of Job's Wisdom on How God Runs the World](#)
- [The Book of Proverbs • What It Teaches About Being Good at Life](#)
- [The Disturbing But Surprising Wisdom of Ecclesiastes](#)