



the heart of God

JUSTICE FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

PART TEN

The Cross and the Justice of God

JOHN 18:28-19:7





Part Ten – The Cross and the Justice of God

By Pastor David Fields

Then I saw ‘a new heavens and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.” – Revelation 21:1

“For John, the sea represents everything that opposes the will of God. The sea represents all that seeks to overcome, undo, destroy the work of God.” – Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*

We ask: *Why doesn't God do something about all the evil and injustice in the world?*

What God gives us is God's own self.

Jesus' Life, Death, and Resurrection Spell the Victory of God Over Evil and Injustice.

I. Evil and Injustice

“Gradually it dawned on me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart – and through all human hearts.” – Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

“Why can't God just 'end' evil with the snap of a finger? If he's all powerful, surely, he could?” True. He could. But God could not “end all evil” without ending you. And me. Because “The line separating good and evil,” and we could add, the line separating those who do justly and those who fail to, or even act oppressively at times, that line “cuts right through this heart.” And it really does.

II. Jesus' Life

“...and they will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’).” – Matthew 1:23b

One of the stunning claims of the Christian faith is that God himself takes on the full human condition, the full human experience. God makes himself vulnerable to the real pain of real evil. And he himself comes to address it head on.

“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” – Luke 2:10b-11.

This is a radical, dangerous, counter-political claim. Jesus confronts the “powers” in this sense. His coming is reclaiming the whole world for himself.

What God gives us is God's own self

Jesus confronts how evil aims to distort and destroy the life God intends for us by healing the sick, raising the dead, and proclaiming forgiveness for sin.

He quotes this text: “...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 4:18b.

Jesus knows that the climax of his ministry will be to deal with death itself.

What God gives us is God's own self – all the way to death.

N.T. Wright reminds us:

“Evil is the force of anti-creation, anti-life, the force which opposes and seeks to deface and destroy God's good world of space, time, and matter, and above all God's image-bearing human creatures. That is why death, as Paul saw so graphically in 1 Corinthians 15:26, is the final great enemy.” – N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*

III. Jesus' Death and Resurrection

John 18:28-19

In Jesus' Trial We See:

1) Jesus' identity

In a mysterious way, the Christian claim is that Jesus is fully human and fully God, at the same time. And so, in an equally mysterious way, God himself as chosen to enter all the muck and mess of a world in pain.

2) Grave injustice

Pilate is not wrong: “I find no basis for a charge against him.” He repeats this over and over. And we, the readers – who has seen how Jesus has just lived his life – we all agree. Jesus is the only human who has ever lived perfectly lined up with God's ways – the only one who has never sinned.

So, the irony of this moment is thick. Jesus, the king of all Creation, is dressed mockingly in robe, and bears a crown of thorns. Here is God's own self, wrongly accused, mistreated, and going all the way to death.

If we are mistreated, when we experience injustice, one thing we can never say to God is: **“You don't know what it's like!”** He does know. Personally. Intimately.



3) That our hurt matters to God

Though I could never claim to know what your pain means exactly. Like, “why is this happening to me?” But I do know what it doesn't mean; what it cannot mean.

Our pain cannot mean “God doesn't love me.” Look at the cross. God puts God's own self there, for me. The cross is God's self-giving love on display.

IV. Jesus' Life, Death, and Resurrection

“Sin is too strong for us. Sin is not just a misdeed here and a mistake there. Sin is a Power that holds all human beings in its grip. Why don't we have peace instead of war? Because of Sin. Why are children poor, abused, neglected, malnourished, sick from drinking bad water? Because of Sin. Because we go round and round in a cycle of selfishness, rapacity, indifference, greed, and vengefulness. If you don't believe that about yourself believe it about the human race.”

– Fleming Rutledge, *The Undoing of Death*

The cross is a horrific way to die. But the main reason why the cross is so significant is that Jesus is bearing, in some mysterious way, the weight of humanity's guilt, and shame, and sin. He's taking the evil of the evil on himself.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.”

– 2 Corinthians 5:21

What God gives us is God's own self – all the way to death

And we are now invited to receive this new life for ourselves.

“...The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me..” – Galatians 2:20b

“Forgiveness of sins in turn means new creation, since the anti-creation force of sin has been dealt with. And new creation begins with the word of forgiveness heard by individual sinners...”

– N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*

This is the great exchange. God's righteousness is given to us, and he takes our sin and unrighteousness on himself.

“He himself bore our sins’ in his own body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”
– 1 Peter 2:24

What God gives is God's own self – and then gives us to the world.

“God has promised in Jesus, to put the whole world right in the end; that's final judgment....In the present time he puts people right with himself – justification by faith – so that they can be part of his putting-right-purposes for the world – justice. If the justified don't have a vision for justice, they haven't understood what justification itself is all about....We are a pilot project for a world made right.” – N.T. Wright

V. We Now Participate in the Victory of God Over Evil and Injustice

God gives us his very presence, to fill and empower us. God the Holy Spirit, making us alive for the sake of the world. And then God gives us, his Spirit empowered people, to join him.

The most explosive thing in all the world, what is bending the world toward justice, is the self-giving sacrifice of God's own self on the cross. And this is the very form of life that God makes possible for us. As Paul says:

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset [or pattern of thinking, feeling and acting] as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!” – Philippians 2:5-8

Why doesn't God do something? **What God gives is God's own self – and then gives us to the world.**





Open Up

One of the most pressing and challenging questions we all have to wrestle with is the goodness of God in the face of ongoing injustice and evil in the world. Has this been a challenge for you? How do you commonly “deal with it”? (Intellectual reasoning? Ignoring it? Just try to distract yourself? Wrestle with doubts?)

Dig In

1. The big idea we looked at this week is that God gives us what we really need – which is not a philosophical argument. God gives us God’s own self, including that God chooses to experience our pain and hurt through Jesus’ death on the cross.
 - a. Why do you think this matters?
 - b. We looked at how the cross cannot mean “God doesn’t love me”, and does mean, “God knows what it’s like – knows pain intimately and personally.” How might this impact the way you think about your own pain?
2. Look at this text in 1 Peter 2. “He himself bore our sins in his own body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds we are healed.’” – 1 Peter 2:24

What reason does this text give for Jesus’ death on the cross? Why is this important for us as we think about God’s mission in the world and his ways of justice?

3. Read and reflect on **Philippians 2:5-8**:

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset – or pattern of thinking, feeling and acting – as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!” – Philippians 2:5-8

- a. Part of God’s answer to evil is making a way for us – those who trust him – to become more like him Jesus. What are the main ways God is calling you to adopt this pattern of “going down” or “lowering yourself” for the sake of others?
- b. Who in your life has modeled this pattern? How might they form a concrete example for you to emulate/learn from?

Prayer

As you’ve listened to each other’s stories and struggles, take time to thank God that he knows what our pain is like. Take time to lift up the needs and desires of each group member, and to ask for God’s empowerment as we seek to embody the Jesus way of life.