

## **For the Love of God**

A Plea for Justice

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### **A PLEA FOR JUSTICE Psalm 82**

If you have a Bible, turn to Psalm 82. Today, we continue our immersion in the Psalms, with different psalms being preached by different pastors in our different worship gatherings. And it's been interesting to see how different psalms have applied in specific ways, even to specific gatherings of people, which, I think, is the case for this psalm in this gathering today.

Last week, Pastor Matt showed us a powerful picture of the justice of God in Psalm 75. And what I want to do with Psalm 82 is to pick up where he left off, and to show us what we need to do in our lives with that picture of God in his justice. We need to know what to do as worshipers of this just God living in an unjust world.

Our world is filled with injustice. We're about to read a psalm that talks about the weak and the fatherless, the afflicted and the destitute, the poor and the needy, and we live in a world filled with all of the above—in mass. A billion people living today in desperate poverty ... starving ...lacking clean water ... basic food ... simple medicine. 153 million orphans. 42 million babies murdered in their mother's womb every single year. 27 million people living in slavery right now ... many of whom are bought, sold, and exploited for sex in a trafficking ring that has become one of the fastest-growing industries on earth. We live in a world of massive injustice. So how are we to understand this world as worshipers of the just God over this world? And how are we to *live* in this world as worshipers of the just God over this world?

This is a question I have found myself wrestling with in a whole new way after my most recent trip to Nepal. To see the poverty I saw ... to hear stories of persecution ... of people being stoned for faith in Christ ... and to come face-to-face with little girls who've been sold into sex slavery ... and to know that none of these people have even heard the name of Jesus. And then to come back and to read with new eyes similar stories in places around the world, even over the last couple of weeks in the news. What do you do with all this?

Do you just turn away from it? Just go on with comfortable life in Birmingham like these realities don't exist?

Turn on the TV, go to the ballgame, get on with your daily schedule—surely that's not the answer. Surely there's more to understanding this world than turning a blind eye and deaf ear to injustice around us. And surely there's something to be done in this world in light of the injustice we see.

What I want to do this morning is very simple. I want to read Psalm 82. I want to show us who God is, and then I want to show us what we do, in light of who God is ... and then I want us to do it. In this room, I want to lead us to do what God in this psalm calls us to do. So let's start by hearing his Word.

*God has taken his place in the divine council;  
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:  
"How long will you judge unjustly*

*and show partiality to the wicked? Selah  
Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;  
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.  
Rescue the weak and the needy;  
deliver them from the hand of the wicked."*

*They have neither knowledge nor understanding,  
they walk about in darkness;  
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.*

*I said, "You are gods,  
sons of the Most High, all of you;  
nevertheless, like men you shall die,  
and fall like any prince."*

*Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
for you shall inherit all the nations! (Psalm 82)*

## **Who God Is ...**

### **He is the sovereign King over all.**

We'll look at three characteristics, or attributes—really even titles—describing who God is. Number one: He is the sovereign King over all. One of the things that makes this psalm difficult to preach (and to understand, for that matter) is confusion over who the "gods" (lowercase "g" gods) are in this passage. Scholars who've studied this psalm and pastors who've preached this psalm are divided over who these "gods" are. There are two main possibilities: First, some believe that these "gods" are demons and evil spirits, what the Bible calls in Ephesians 6 "*cosmic powers over this present darkness*" (Ephesians 6:12). They're fallen angels and false gods who work to spread evil in the world. So that's one option.

Second, the other option is that these "gods" are human judges and rulers in the world who are promoting injustice in the world. This argument is based on instances in the Old Testament, like Exodus 21-22, where the judges whom God had set up to rule in Israel were referred to as "gods" in the original language of the Old Testament. Basically, this was because God had set them up as the agents of *his* judgment among his people.

As judges, they were recipients of God's Word responsible for passing judgment according to it. When they acted justly, on God's authority, they were a picture of God's judgment. In this way, they were a reflection of God's authority, and in that sense they had a god-like function among God's people. This option for interpretation is actually bolstered by Jesus' words in John 10:35-36, where he quotes from this psalm (Psalm 82), and he refers to the judges of Israel as the ones whom God called "gods." It's for this reason, namely, that Jesus references the judges of Israel as ones whom God called gods, that I am inclined to go with this second option—that the lowercase "g" gods who are referred to here are human judges who were given authority to judge as representatives of God.

With that said, though, ultimately, the answer to this question of who the gods are doesn't change the primary meaning of the passage, for the point is clear. There is one God—one capital "G" God who reigns over all gods. He reigns over all men and women, over all rulers and leaders, and he reigns over all the principalities and powers, the devil and his demons

who influence men and women, rulers and leaders. In verse 6 of Psalm 82 God says they will all die...they will all fall...they will all perish...they will all be punished. God will outlast them all because he is the sovereign King over all. There is only one capital "G" God, and he is on the throne of the world. No one else.

### **He is the good Judge of all.**

God is the sovereign King over all, and second, He is the good Judge of all. From the very beginning of this psalm, God is presiding as Judge in the divine council, and his goodness is clearly contrasted with the wickedness of the gods who surround him. He holds judgment over them. So this is not a trial where God is sitting at a court bench, listening to facts, trying to discover who's right and who's wrong. No...it's clear from the start that God alone is right and these gods are all wrong. They are not good. They are unjust according to verse 2. They show partiality to the wicked. And with their position, are oppressing the weak and the fatherless.

They are not maintaining the rights of the afflicted and the destitute. They're giving the weak over into the hands of the wicked. And the result is, according to the end of verse 5, *"All the foundations of the earth are shaken."*

When the justice of God is not reflected in the judges and the rulers and the leaders and the presidents and the politicians of the world...the result is a shaking of the earth's foundations...and a spreading of evil. This is what happens when evil judges on the earth turn away from the good Judge over all. Oh, God help us...may we be warned...in this church...and in our culture...in our country...in this world. This is what happens when we ignore the good Judge over all. The fabric and the foundations of our lives and our families and our culture crumble. And the effects are devastating on the poor, on the weak, on the needy, on the afflicted, on the fatherless, on the destitute. Injustice spreads when we rebel against the good Judge of all.

### **He is the merciful Savior for all.**

God is the sovereign King over all...he is the good Judge of all, and third, He is the merciful Savior for all. As a reflection of God's goodness, see in this psalm a picture of God's mercy. For he loves the weak and the fatherless. He cares for the afflicted and the destitute. He rescues the weak and the needy. One commentator said this psalm is one of the most spectacular in all the psalms because of its definition of God who ties "his divinity to the fate of the poor and dispossessed."

In verse 5 there is debate over whether or not the "they" here is referring to the weak and the needy or the gods/the judges. So if it's the gods, or the judges, then this verse is talking about how they don't have knowledge or understanding, and they walk in moral darkness. So that's one option. But the other option, and again, this would be the option that I lean toward—that this is a reference to the "weak and the needy" in the previous verse, and it describes the plight of all humanity living in an unjust world. When judges and rulers and leaders do not judge and rule and lead according to the good judgment, rule, and leadership of God, then the result is a lost world, walking about in darkness with no foundation to stand upon. In other words, this is a picture of humanity in need not just of a sovereign King and good Judge, but a merciful Savior to deliver and rescue from evil and injustice.

Which leads right to the last verse. After God makes his sovereign Kingship over these gods and judges known, the psalmist closes Psalm 82 with a prayer, *"Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit the nations!"* This is what we *must* do.

## What We Do ...

What do we do in a world of injustice? What do we do when we open our eyes to the world around us and open our ears to the Word before us? Here's what we do.

### **We plead for God's justice to reign.**

We plead for God's justice to reign. We say, "Arise, O God, and judge the earth." We ask God to come and show his good judgment. We ask him to act. We pray and we plead for him to do something. To stop injustice. To show his justice. This is what we do—based on what we know. We know God is the sovereign King over all. We know God is the good Judge of all. We know God is the merciful Savior to all.

We know he's the Father to the fatherless, and the Defender of the weak, and the Provider for the poor, and so we plead for God to rise up and judge this earth accordingly.

### **We anticipate God's kingdom to come.**

Then the psalmist says in the second half of verse 8, *"For you shall inherit all the nations!"* We know he's the good Judge of all, so we plead for God's justice to reign. And second, we know he's the sovereign King over all, and so we anticipate God's kingdom to come. Isn't the psalmist's prayer here precisely what Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer? *"Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"* (Matthew 6:9-13). Your will be done...your just will according to your good Word...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We ask God to judge, and then we anticipate God to come—to come and claim his inheritance. To come and establish a new heaven and a new earth where evil and injustice will be no more...and goodness and justice will reign forever. This is what we do. We plead for God's justice to reign, and we keep pleading with anticipation in our hearts, because we want God's kingdom to come.

### **We spread God's salvation to the needy.**

Now, see the importance of prayer...see it...and we're going to feel it, I hope, as we do it in a minute, but I need to point to one other thing we do. Because as important as these two actions are...they're not where we stop. We don't just plead for God's justice to reign: we spread God's salvation to the needy. In other words, we do what this psalm says to do. Now as I've mentioned, this psalm was likely addressed to judges in Israel, and so there was specific application to them—an application that in some ways (not every way) parallels the situation of all those who are in ruling or judging or leading positions in the world.

There are judges who are among us in this faith family ... politicians who are among us in this faith family ... two members—Tom Vignuelle and Amie Beth Shaver—who will have their names on the ballot this Tuesday. Tom is running for national office and Amie Beth running for state office, and I praise God for these and other members of our faith family who *have* and *pursue* leadership in our culture and our country in these ways. They have a responsibility to rule and judge and lead and make laws in light of God's justice. But the application here is not just for rulers and judges and leaders like these. For what God commands here, he also commands his people to do all throughout Scripture. *"Give justice to the weak and the fatherless"* (verse 3). *"Maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute"* (verse 3). *"Rescue the weak and the needy"* (verse 4). *"Deliver them from the hand of the wicked"* (verse 4).

Brothers and sisters, mark this down: God has not called you and me to sit back in a world of injustice content to wring our hands in pious concern while praying our prayers in relative

comfort. No, he has called us to give our lives spreading the salvation of our good God to those who are in need. To lay down our lives showing his mercy to people here in Birmingham and to people around the world. And this is not just what God calls us to do...this is what Christ compels us to do! Oh, see yourself in the psalm. You and I...in our sin...weak and needy. You and I...in our sin...afflicted and destitute. For that matter, you and I...in our sin...wicked and destined to die. But God, in his mercy, has sent his Son to die for us in our place. He has pursued us. And he has brought us from death to life. He has become poor so that we might become rich. So now, in light of the God who came to us in Christ to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captive, to set at liberty those who are oppressed ... now, it just makes sense for all those associated with this Christ to spread the salvation we have received to others who are in need.

What does the Lord require of you?, Micah 6:8 asks. To do justice. And to love kindness. As you walk humbly with your God—the sovereign King over all, the good Judge of all, and the merciful Savior for all.

You and I give our lives and our resources doing justice. It's the only option; it's the only thing that makes sense for those who have received God's salvation in their need ... to spread God's salvation to those in need.

Now, we're going to do verse 8 ... all across this room, we're going to cry out for God's justice to reign on the earth.

## **How We Pray ...**

Now, we're going to do verse 8. All across this room, we're going to cry out for God's justice to reign on the earth. I want to help us know how to pray. Get in groups of 2, 3, 4, 5 and gather together, sit down, stand, kneel where you are, in the aisle, on benches, wherever is best. Pray one at a time. Non-Christians, we invite you to listen in. I'll transition us to the next section.

Let's pray.

### **Pray for the poor ...**

- Pray for provision of food for the hungry and clean, safe drinking water for the thirsty.
- Pray for medical provision for children and adults suffering and dying of preventable diseases.
- Pray for refugees who have been separated from their homes due to natural and moral disasters.
- Pray for the church to give generously, sacrificially, and cheerfully to the poor.

### **Pray for the orphan ...**

- Pray for children and their parents in the foster care system.
- Pray for children and their caregivers in orphanages.
- Pray for foster care and adoptive families.
- Pray for the church to show the love of the Father in heaven to the fatherless on earth.

### **Pray for the enslaved ...**

- Pray for victims ...
  - For their strength and salvation

- For their protection, freedom, and justice
- For their hope and healing
- Pray for traffickers and customers ...
  - For conviction, repentance, and salvation
  - For criminal networks to be dismantled
  - For oppressors to be arrested and punished
- Pray for governments ...
  - For corruption to cease
  - For implementation of just legislation
  - For discernment in forming alliances
- Pray for the church ...
  - To awaken to this issue and to unite against injustice
  - For advocates and laborers to emerge
  - To flee sexual immorality

#### **Pray for the persecuted ...**

- Pray for persecuted believers ...
  - That they would hold fast to the hope God gives
  - That they would know the depth of God's love for them
  - That the Holy Spirit will strengthen them and their families
  - For their boldness in sharing the gospel amidst persecution
- Pray for persecutors ...
  - That they would see Christ in the saints they are persecuting and be saved
  - That they would be brought to justice

#### **Pray for the unreached ...**

- For more laborers to go to them.
- For open doors to share with them.
- For receptive hearts among them.
- For eternal salvation to come to them.

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