

Session 3



God Is Just

THE POINT

Because God is righteous, He alone establishes justice.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“ . . . and justice for all.”

For as long as any of us can remember, those four words signaled the start of the school day, VBS opening assembly, and every Boy Scout or Girl Scout meeting. Chances are, even if those words weren't part of our Pledge of Allegiance, our desire for justice would still be deeply ingrained.

A car that sped by you gets pulled over by a state trooper. Justice.

The neighbor who never edges his sidewalk finally gets fined by the HOA. Justice.

Your boss pays attention to the extra hours you've been putting in, and you get promoted. Justice.

But what happens when you're the offender? You forget to return something you borrowed. You get caught driving solo in the HOV lane.

There's an honest mistake on your tax return. Suddenly, your cry for justice becomes a plea for mercy. Maybe the pledge should say, "with liberty and justice for all, but mercy for me."

How does God balance it all? Can the same God be both just and merciful? Can He give evildoers their comeuppance and also be compassionate toward those who fear Him?

He can. He does. He has. He will.

QUESTION 1:

How do you react when you see a speeding car get pulled over by the police?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

PSALM 7:1-5

¹ LORD my God, I seek refuge in you; save me from all my pursuers and rescue me, ² or they will tear me like a lion, ripping me apart with no one to rescue me. ³ LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice on my hands, ⁴ if I have done harm to one at peace with me or have plundered my adversary without cause, ⁵ may an enemy pursue and overtake me; may he trample me to the ground and leave my honor in the dust. Selah

When you read the Psalms, don't skip over the opening information (called a superscription). Each one can give you insights that will help you understand the psalm better. In the case of Psalm 7, we learn that it was written by David. It's categorized as a "Shiggaion," which is an unknown musical term. Since it's only found here and in Habakkuk 3, it's anyone's best guess what it means. Since both Habakkuk 3 and Psalm 7 express deep emotion, it could suggest a freer, passionate, poetic form.¹

So, what was David so deeply emotional about? The superscription says it was "concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite." There's no record in Scripture of a specific event David was referencing, but since David was of the tribe of Judah and his predecessor Saul was a Benjaminite, there were probably some harsh words spoken by the Benjaminites when David took the throne. And don't forget, this was not a peaceful transfer of power. For eight years after David was anointed by Samuel, Saul kept trying to kill him, until Saul himself was killed in battle.² This psalm was probably either written while David was on the run from Saul, or years later when he reflected back on that time.

David knew where to turn when his enemies were pursuing him. He sought refuge in God. Whenever the Bible spells the word "LORD" in small caps, it's the translator's indication that this was the Hebrew word for God's personal covenant name, usually transliterated "Yahweh." So, not only did David use God's personal name, he added his personal relationship with God: "Yahweh my God" (v. 1).

David didn't merely seek refuge in God; he sought refuge in God *alone*. Notice in verse 2 David told God that if David's pursuers were able to overtake him, they would rip him apart "with no one to rescue me." David was all in with God. He didn't have a plan B. If God wasn't going to rescue him, he wasn't going to be rescued.

It's worth stopping for a minute to ask the question, is God your God? They say there are no atheists in foxholes, but there's a big difference between praying "God, if You're up there, can You get me out of this mess?" and "Oh Lord, my God, in You I take refuge." The first expresses hope, but no confidence. The second expresses both hope and confidence.

Part of the reason David had confidence is that he knew God is a just God. God has shown us how to live the kind of lives that please Him, but He has also made it clear that He hates injustice and “will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Ex. 34:7). In Psalm 7:3-5, David took a personal moral inventory. In effect, he told God, “Look, if this is because of a wrong I’ve done to someone, then I deserve what’s coming to me.” As far as David could tell, though, he hadn’t done any of these things. He could call on the God of justice with a clear conscience, confident that he hadn’t been the perpetrator of injustice.

This kind of personal inventory is an important first step when we seek refuge from God or call

on God for justice. In another psalm, David gave us all a great outline for how to ask God for help with this time of reflection:

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23-24).

QUESTION 2:

When have you seen God be a refuge for someone?

PSALM 7:6-9

⁶ Rise up, LORD, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my adversaries; awake for me; you have ordained a judgment. ⁷ Let the assembly of peoples gather around you; take your seat on high over it. ⁸ The LORD judges the peoples; vindicate me, LORD, according to my righteousness and my integrity. ⁹ Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous. The one who examines the thoughts and emotions is a righteous God.

According to the Reuters News Service, between 2008 and 2019, more than fifteen hundred judges either resigned, retired, or faced public discipline following accusations of misconduct. Yet, the same study showed that 9 out of 10 judges remained on the bench even after facing disciplinary action for misconduct.³ Unrighteous judges are nothing new. Injustice is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament. Jesus made an unrighteous judge the main character in one of His parables (see Luke 18:1-8). If one verse could sum up the conflict between justice and injustice, it might be Romans 3:10: “There is no one righteous, not

even one.” If we are looking for a perfect judge, we will never find one sitting on a courtroom bench. Which is why we need to look above the bench. Literally. On the front wall of many American courtrooms, as well as in the chamber of the House of Representatives, is the phrase “In God We Trust.” It is there as a reminder that God alone is the Righteous Judge.

We see this in verses 6-9. In verse 7, David seems to be picturing a courtroom: God is at the center of a great assembly of people—probably all the Israelites—since a different Hebrew word is typically used for people of other nations. God takes His seat high above them. From

there, David pictures God judging David's adversaries and vindicating David. I like the way Eugene Peterson translates these verses in The Message translation:

"My accusers have packed the courtroom; it's judgment time. Take your place on the bench, reach for your gavel, throw out the false charges against me. I'm ready, confident in your verdict: 'Innocent'" (Psalm 7:6b-8).

David wasn't just expressing confidence that the Lord is the Judge of all the earth and will do what is right, as Abraham did when he was bargaining with God over the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 18:23). Instead, David was expressing confidence that God, the only Righteous Judge, would do right by him. Like we talked about in the previous section, David had searched his own heart, and while he knew he wasn't sinless, he believed he was innocent of the accusations made by his enemies. And since God alone is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart, David was confident of his vindication. Human judges can't do that. They can't read your mind or see inside your heart. Judges can only consider the testimony of others and the physical evidence presented both for and against you, interpreting it through their own human perspective. But God sees your heart.

Should that thought make us glad or nervous? On one hand, we can breathe a sigh of relief that God doesn't need the testimony of anyone else to know the truth about us (see John 2:25). But this also means we can't lie to God.

You might have a great poker face, and you might be capable of pulling the wool over the eyes of a lot of people. You probably have even fooled yourself. But you can't fool God. Hebrews 4 teaches that God, through His Word, can judge your every thought and intention. Nothing is hidden from Him (Hebrews 4:12-13).

The good news is that, despite all this, God still loves us! God sent His Son to be our great High Priest. That allows us to "approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). This is why David was so confident in verse 9 that the evil of the wicked would come to an end and the righteous would be established. God alone is the Righteous Judge.

QUESTION 3:

Why is it important to trust God for our vindication?

PSALM 7:10-13

¹⁰ My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. ¹¹ God is a righteous judge and a God who shows his wrath every day. ¹² If anyone does not repent, he will sharpen his sword; he has strung his bow and made it ready. ¹³ He has prepared his deadly weapons; he tips his arrows with fire.

Engage

MY REFLECTION

Consider where you stand on each point taken from this passage.
Then craft a prayer of thanks for who God is.

I am confident that:

I can look to God for rescue when I feel attacked and/or afraid. (vv. 1-2)

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

God is able to evaluate my heart and see the truth. (vv. 3-5)

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

God can bring about earthly judgment when needed. (vv. 6)

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

God sees rightly. He knows the truth in every circumstance. (vv. 7-8)

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

God sees humans accurately. He knows our hearts fully. (vv. 9-10)

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Unjust actions will receive justice from God at the right time. (vv. 11-16)

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

My Prayer:

QUESTION 4:

How has God been a shield for you?

So far, almost everything we've said about God's justice and righteousness has felt comforting and reassuring. God loves us. We can trust Him to render a right verdict. He has told us what it takes to please Him, and we can be confident that He knows the way of the righteous (Psalm 1). Yet, for all that, there are two sides to God's righteous judgment. God pardons, but He also punishes.

Verse 11 takes a sharp turn. After David once again expressed his confidence that his shield was with God and that God saves the upright in heart, David dropped a stark warning: God shows His wrath every day. At this point in Psalm 7, David left the courtroom imagery behind and shifted to the battlefield. God is also a Valiant Warrior.

- God has sharpened His sword.
- God has restrung His bow.
- God has prepared His deadly weapons.
- God has tipped His arrows with fire.

Today, we would say He is locked and loaded! Against whom? Those who don't repent. Repentance literally means to turn back or to turn away. For Christians, we associate it with turning away from sin. But here, David was probably thinking about his earthly enemies. Remember what he called his adversaries in verse 1? "Pursuers." And what's the opposite

of pursuing? Retreating. David seems to have been expressing confidence that if his earthly enemies didn't turn back, God would exercise His wrath against them.

Maybe David only had human adversaries in mind when he penned Psalm 7. But later in his life, he would have a front-row seat to God's wrath against sin. One night, while David was strolling on the roof of the palace, he saw the wife of one of his most trusted men, bathing. Since her husband was away, fighting against the Philistines, David sent for her and slept with her. Later, he tried to cover his sin by having the warrior killed in battle.

When the prophet Nathan confronted him, he repented, and God forgave him. But he still had to face the consequences of his sin. The son Bathsheba was carrying died after he was born. David's family life was a train wreck from that point on. And the united kingdom he had reigned over would only last one more generation before it was split by civil war. You can read the whole sad story beginning in 2 Samuel 11.

Without repentance, judgment awaits. But when we repent and turn to God, He "is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). There may still be earthly consequences to our sin, but the eternal consequences have been blotted out.

QUESTION 5:

How does this passage help us understand the need for repentance?

LIVE IT OUT

David was far from perfect. His life demonstrates God’s justice against sin, no matter who commits it. But it also demonstrates God’s forgiveness of sin for those who repent. This week:

- **Read.** Read Psalm 51 and Psalm 32. They both are believed to have been written by David after his sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 51 is a psalm of repentance. Psalm 32 is a psalm of praise for forgiveness.
- **Reflect.** Ask God to help you take the same moral inventory David did. Have you hurt someone? Taken advantage of someone? Are you holding a grudge against someone? If God brings someone specific to mind, write his or her name in the margin.
- **Repent.** Don’t just be sorry for your sin; turn away from it. Make a plan to break that sin’s stronghold in your life.



1. Chad Brand et al., eds., "Shiggaion," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1486.
2. J. Josh Smith and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1–50*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2022), 51–52.
3. Michael Berens and John Shiffman, "Thousands of U.S. Judges Who Broke Laws or Oaths Remained on the Bench," *Reuters*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-judges-misconduct/>