

Justice

A Bible Study

There are over 2000 verses in the Bible that deal with poverty and justice. To make this point, a pastor in the US once took a scissors and an old King James Bible, and cut out every verse that had anything to do with these two topics. When he got through, he had very little left of the Bible.

No one is suggesting that you start cutting up Bibles willy-nilly, the point, though, is a sound one. If we are to take the Bible seriously, we cannot ignore the fact that justice is near to God's heart. So what is this thing called "justice"? That same pastor used this example:

Imagine yourself standing near a waterfall enjoying the view and the beauty of God's creation when suddenly you hear a voice crying for help and you see upstream there is someone floating, helpless, towards the waterfall. You and your friends grab a branch and whatever else might help and you go in and pull this person to the shore. As everyone is rejoicing at the disaster that was averted and the life that was saved, you hear another voice in the water; they too are floating helpless towards the waterfall. Once more everyone grabs the branch and links arms, eventually grabbing the person and pulling them to shore. Yet a third time you hear another voice and as you look upstream you see person after person bobbing up and down, floating helplessly towards the waterfall. Mercy is pulling these people out of the water. Justice is marching up the river and finding out who is throwing these people in the water and putting a stop to it.

Remember from class that a *dramaturg* works on historical and cultural research into the play and its setting. *Justice* is one of the main themes of *To See The Stars*. This Bible study is intended to give you an idea of the concept of *justice* from a Christian and Biblical perspective. There are 12 sections: letters A-L. You are to select 6 of these sections as a class assignment. You may do more if you would like. Try to be as complete as possible in your answers.

A. Our God is a God of Justice

Read **Psalm 33:5** and **Isaiah 61:8**.

1. What two things do these verses say God loves?

2. What two things do these verses say God hates?

God expects us to live accordingly. Read **Micah 6:8** and **Deuteronomy 16:20**

3. What does God require of his people?

B. Laws of Justice

There is incredible detail in the Old Testament about the way in which justice was to be practiced in daily living. Look up these passages which include some of the laws among God's people that deal with just actions: **Exodus 22:25-27, Exodus 23:1-13, Leviticus 19:11-37, Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 10:17-19, and Deuteronomy 15:1-4.** Match a *specific verse* from your reading above with these justice topics below:

1. Justice in business:
2. Justice for strangers (sojourners or foreigners):
3. Justice for widows and orphans:
4. Justice in the courts:
5. Justice in banking:

C. The Oppression of the Poor

Read **Psalms 10:2,7-18.**

1. What can be said about those who oppress the poor?
2. What is God's attitude toward them?

Wealthy factory owners in the 1900s often never actually set foot into the factories to see the conditions present there. In fact these businessmen were often seen as leaders of the community. Some of them even built libraries or made a great show of donating to charities.

3. How is this like "lurking in secret" as the psalmist says?

Read **Luke 18:9-14.**

4. How could these factory owners be compared to the pharisees of Jesus' day?

D. The Cycle of Poverty

Sometimes we think of the poor as being poor through their own laziness. In fact the Proverbs warn that poverty can come about because of laziness. But this is often not the case. Read **Proverbs 13:23**.

1. What does this imply about the efforts of the working poor?

Read **Proverbs 14:20, Proverbs 19:4, and Proverbs 19:7**

2. What happens when people are in poverty?

3. How does their condition tend to lock them into what sociologists call a “cycle of poverty”?

E. Those Who Care for the Poor

Read **Psalms 41:1-3, Psalms 112:5-9, Proverbs 14:31, Proverbs 19:17, Proverbs 22:9, Proverbs 28:27, and Proverbs 29:7**.

1. What are the responsibilities of the righteous to the poor?

2. How does God view those who are kind to the poor?

Read **Proverbs 31:8-9**

3. What are we to do when the rights of others are being trampled?

F. The Kings, the Corrupt, and the Cows

Read **Jeremiah 21:12** and **Micah 3:1**

1. According to these verses what was the role of the “House of David”, Israel’s line of kings?

Ancient Israel became very prosperous. Unfortunately, its leaders, who should have administered justice, didn’t. Read **Amos 5: 7, Amos 5:10-12, and Amos 8: 4-6**

2. What did they do instead?

3. How might the labor conditions in *To See The Stars* be like the practices of the rich in the prophet Amos’ time?

Amos makes it clear that is not just active violence that God despises. Even benefitting from the exploitation of the poor is seen as sinful. He refers to the wealthy wives of the wicked Israelites as “cows”. Read **Amos 4:1 -2**.

4. What does the prophet say will happen to them?

Despite their sinful practices, the wealthy Israelites made a great show of their religion through elaborate ceremonies, rituals, and feasts (for the upper classes, of course). Read **Amos 5:21-24**

5. What does God say about these practices?

6. What does he wish to see “roll on like a river” instead?

G. The Coming Messiah

Isaiah prophesied the coming of a messiah whom we know as Christians is Jesus Christ.

Read **Isaiah 42:1-4**.

1. What does this passage say he will bring forth ? (Note verses 1, 3, and 4)

Read **Luke 4:16-21**

2. Which prophet does Jesus read from at the beginning of his ministry?

3. Describe the purpose of Jesus ministry on Earth based on this verse.

4. In a spiritual sense we, as sinful humans, are all poor and oppressed. Can the verse from Isaiah have more than one meaning? If yes, describe these meanings.

H. The Christian Walk and Justice

Read **1 John 2:6**.

1. If we claim to be Christians what must we do?

Read **Matthew 20:28 and Matthew 25:31-46**.

2. Based on these verses describe the Christian “walk”.

I. The Eye of the Needle

In Jesus' day it was commonly assumed that the wealthy were favored by God because they had been given much. Most believed that surely these favored few would inherit eternal life.

Read **Mark 10:17-26**.

1. What are Jesus' instructions to the young man?
2. What does the young man do?
3. Based on **Matthew 6:24**, Why would Jesus say that it is so difficult for wealthy people to enter the kingdom of God?

Read **Romans 3:23** and then read Jesus answer to his disciples in **Mark 10:27** and **John 14:6**.

4. Can anyone be saved through their own efforts?
5. Through whom will the wealthy be saved, if at all?
6. What does Jesus say about himself and God the Father?

J. The Rich Man and Lazarus

Read **Luke 16:19-31**

1. What does the rich man do with his money?
2. Where did Lazarus "lay"?
3. What might the rich man have done with his wealth that he did not do?
4. Does this parable suggest that we get a second chance to serve others once we are dead, or not?

K. Active Non-Violence.

Read **Matthew 5:38-48** and **Romans 12:14-21**

1. How are we to respond to acts of oppression?
2. The usual choices of response to oppression are "fight or flight". How is this different?
3. According to these verses what would obeying these precepts do for the oppressed?
4. Based on these verses what kind of strike would be a "just" strike on the part of the workers in the play?
5. What would make a strike "unjust"?
6. At various times in history unions have been criticized because some have made gains for their members by thuggery and bribery. What would a Christian response to such behavior be?

L. James on "Ill-gotten" Wealth

Read **James 5:1-4**

1. How did the rich people become wealthy in these verses?
2. How does God view this "ill-gotten" wealth?
3. What will happen to the wealthy who gained their wealth through such means?

Most of us are among the wealthiest 10% of the world's population. Many laborers in third world countries work for pitiable wages, sometimes starving while being fully employed, to make the products that we buy at "discount" prices.

4. Do James' words apply to us as well? Why or why not?