

Series: "Psalms in the Summer"  
Part 3: "He Rules With Justice"

I once watched a musical version *Tom Sawyer* on TV. At one point in the film, Tom is being scolded by an adult, and feeling very misunderstood. The actor playing Tom Sawyer sings:

"If'n I was God, well just for spite, I wouldn't set the sun at night  
'Til everyone was treated right, by everyone else they see.

If'n I was God, I'd fix it so, without explainin, folks would know;  
They'd know what's goin' on inside of everyone else like me.

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Nobody'd hurt nobody else  
I wouldn't let it be.

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Ifn' I was God, I'd make us wise, that everyone could realize  
that everywhere beneath the skies, everyone needs everyone.

And God, that ain't half of what I would do,  
If'n I was you."

Have you ever thought, "If *I ruled the world*, I'd do things differently! I'd correct some of the wrongs in life. A long time sports writer for a Philadelphia newspaper often began his column: "When I'm king of the universe.....". If *you* were God and in charge of the world, what would you change?

In a folksy way, Tom Sawyer was struggling with *justice*. "Justice" has to do with getting a fair shake, people getting treated fair and square.

***A number of psalms proclaim that God is a God of justice – and that He rules the world in a just and fair way.*** Psalm 96 is one of those. The writer praises God, then goes on: "Say to all the nations, 'The Lord is king! The earth is set firmly in place and cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with justice'" (Psalm 96:10). In verse 13 of Psalm 96 it says, "For he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth."

*Psalm 9* is another psalm that praises God for His fairness in ruling the world. It's a bit more personal – God is just and fair because He has turned His back on the psalmist's enemies: "When my enemies turned back, they stumbled and perished before you. For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment" (Psalm 9:3-4). Then the psalm writer goes on: "But the Lord sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment. He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with equity" (verses 7-8). And also, "The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. The wicked shall depart to Sheol, all the

nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever” (verses 16-18).

These are just two of a number of psalms that envision God judging people and nations, governing life in a way that’s fair.

But maybe you are thinking, “*Well, it sure doesn’t seem like God rules the world with justice! There are loads of things in life that just aren’t fair!*” A businessman goes to Iraq to help that country rebuild after the war. A group of extremists kidnap him, and after toying with him and teasing the world with threats, they behead him. And it’s all captured on videotape.

And then there’s a lady I knew, Kay Bailey. She was on the staff at Hempfield UMC. She loved the Lord, and was a key leader in that church’s music ministry, with keen insights into how churches can be transformed. She was just starting her own consulting business. On the way back home from Reading, where her church’s praise band had played, she lost her life in a car accident. I could not help but wonder why God allowed this vibrant lover of Jesus to die when there are so many people still living who aren’t doing much good at all! So God rules the world with justice? You gotta be kidding!!

Many of the things we face in everyday life are justice issues! *It begins early in life – even children are concerned about justice (though they don’t call it that).* Did you ever hear this from your kids or grandkids? “It isn’t fair!” “He got more dessert than me.” “How come she can stay up late, and I can’t?”

*Justice is a concern no matter how old or young we may be.* Why did she get a lead part in the musical, even though others definitely were more talented? He got the promotion I deserved – probably because he goes drinking with the boss. She left her husband for another man, yet he gets the short end of the stick when it comes to property settlement and child custody rights. The guy up the street recently retired. He was looking forward to doing all the things he never had time to do when he was working. Now he was just diagnosed with cancer, and has but a short time to live.

*Many of the stories that make the local, national or world news have to do with justice.* A local judge is stopped by a policeman. It appears he used his position to influence the officer to not write him up. How fair is that?

A pickup truck smashes into a group of 10 motorcycles on a rural road in New Hampshire. Seven people are dead. The pickup truck driver had had 2 previous arrests for drunken driving, one just over a month before this accident. His commercial license should have been taken away. Afterwards it was discovered that in the Massachusetts Department of Transportation offices, notices of driving offenses were stuck in an electronic queue no one was responsible for checking. Tens of thousands of violation notices that were to be mailed to offenders were sorted into bins and left in a records room. Another set of notices seemed to have disappeared altogether. And in top of it all, he was driving for a company that had a string of violations!

Thousands of migrants languish at our southern border. For years no President – whether a Republican or Democrat – no Congress, whether controlled by Republicans or Democrats, has been able to form a sensible immigration policy. It's a political hot potato, dividing the nation. What's fair? For those who want to get into the country? For those here illegally? For those working towards citizenship *legally*? What's fair for communities that have to absorb a stream of migrants?

Life *is not* always fair. A lot of people *don't* get a fair shake. Yet the psalm writers insist that God rules the world with justice and equity! *How do we explain this?*

***The ancient Hebrews struggled with this question also.*** Often, their nation – Israel – seemed to get the short end of the stick. Time and again they were defeated by more dominant world powers. So, they wrestled with the question: If God is King and in control of the world, and they are His people, why do godless people so often triumph?

This heartfelt questioning is expressed in some of the psalms. For instance, Psalm 82. The writer begins proclaiming God's sovereignty: "God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment among the 'gods'" (Psalm 82:1). But immediately he challenges God: "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?" (Psalm 82:2).

And then there is that marvelous Book of Job in the Old Testament, where Job is a righteous man, and loses just about everything. Job questions the common belief of his day, the simplistic idea that the wicked are punished in this life, and good people rewarded with wealth, good fortune, and long life. Job screams out, "*That isn't true! Not always!*"

What can we say then? Does God rule the world with justice, as some of the psalms proclaim? If so, how do we reconcile that fact with all of the injustices that we see all around us, and sometimes in own life experience? Here are some comments as we look at the Word of God.

***Affirming that God is just and governs life with fairness is sometimes more a matter of faith and trust than it is seeing tangible evidence of that.*** The Bible insists that God *does* rule the peoples of the world with justice (as Psalm 96:13 says). The psalm writers are not whistling in the dark or deluded in echoing that conviction. It's just that sometimes God's power and sovereignty are *hidden* – for now. Many of Jesus' parables suggest that God's kingdom or rule is often *hidden*. *But when the results are in, God balances the scales of justice. Evil is punished. Goodness is rewarded. Everyone gets their fair shake.*

See, we have an advantage the Hebrew psalm writers didn't have. We have the New Testament and we have Jesus' word on this. During most of the Old Testament period there was little belief in life after death. So, if God was going to reward good people and punish evil, *it had to happen in this life.*

*But that isn't always the way things work, is it?* A lot of ungodly people get rich, have few health problems, live into their 80s and 90's, etc. Conversely, many good people have all kinds

of problems, or die young, etc. But since Jesus and the New Testament teach a final judgment and life beyond the grave, *God has all eternity to balance the scales of justice*. So...sometimes we can see God's judgments being clearly worked out here on earth – but in some cases, God will wait until the Last Judgment to balance the scales.

I hope that what I have been saying is helpful. But maybe you are wondering, “How does this relate to my daily life? How should I live differently after hearing this sermon?” Well, it's important that we realize ***God is serious about justice, and we should be too, if we are following of Jesus***. Wherever someone is shortchanged, or treated unfairly, or taken advantage of, we can be sure this has God's attention! And it should have mine, too! Followers of Jesus are called to work with God in trying to bring about justice in every aspect of life.

Throughout the Bible, God's people are commanded to seek justice! Leviticus 19:15 says, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” Micah 6:8 tells us: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” And Psalm 106:3 has it, “Blessed are those who maintain justice...”. What are situations where you can stand up for somebody getting the short end of the stick? Is there a place where you or I need to oppose something that's wrong and hurting others? In our neighborhood. At our school or job? In our family? Situations where we think, “This just isn't right; it isn't fair...somebody's got to do something about this!” *To be followers of Jesus means we share God's concern that all people get a fair shake.*

There is a larger picture here than just me, as an individual, sticking up for the underdog. For instance: How can we, in an affluent society, exemplify a lifestyle that shows a concern for social justice? How can I justify spending so much on clothing, homes, cars, electronics, entertainment, etc. when people in Third World countries – *and some in our own country* - lack the essentials of life?

Rather than struggle with this (as we probably should), some justify and even flaunt wealth as a sign of God's favor. ***There are the prosperity gospel hucksters***. TV preachers (I could name some names).

Jessie needs a new jet! Jessie Duplantis is a TV evangelist. Recently he told his audience and followers that he needs a new \$54 million jet. The one he has won't do. He needs one that can travel anywhere in the world without stopping for refueling. That would save money, he argues, because he has his own “fuel farm”. He justifies having a private jet by saying if Jesus were on earth today, He wouldn't be riding on a donkey – he'd be riding in his own jet plane. He says God told him he needs this plane! By the way, Jesse's estimated net worth is \$50 million, with an annual salary of \$6 million).

But Duplantis isn't the only TV evangelist riding around in his own jet. Kenneth Copeland has *two!* He has his own airport next to his mansion in Texas. He claims if he flew commercial he'd have to stop 65% of what he's doing. He said he doesn't fly commercial because he doesn't “want to get into a tube with a bunch of demons.” He's flown his jets to a vacation ski resort in

Colorado at least 143 times since 2000.

Creflo Dollar also has one! A top of the line Gulfstream G650. The cost? “\$65 million. Although criticized by many for asking his supporters for this, his ministry leaders said, “We plan to acquire a Gulfstream G650 because it is the best, and it is a reflection of the level of excellence at which this organization chooses to operate.” As one journalist said in an article, “I don’t know what’s worse: the fact that Creflo Dollar believes God spoke to him and told him to buy this jet, or the fact that people are so gullible and delusional and are actually supporting this guy.” Jim Wallis, a Christian leader and founder of Sojourners, responds to all of this by saying: “The Lord says how we treat the poor is how we’re going to be judged.”

***Genuine Christianity, drawn from the New Testament, maintains a healthy balance between evangelism and personal salvation, and, on other hand, expressing this faith in society – social action, social justice.*** Evangelical Christians have often had a poor track record. They have focused on “saving souls” – personal salvation – and ignored the broader social dimension of our faith: opposing things in society that hurt people, hold people down, or deny persons or groups their rights.

Mainline Protestant denominations, like the United Methodist Church, for a number of years now have been coming down more on the side of emphasizing *social justice*. To me, this is troubling, if making disciples is no longer our number 1 priority. But we can’t forget that both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, God is always concerned with and on the side of those who are marginalized, oppressed, powerless, or forgotten. The truth is, sometimes Christians have shown little interest in working with God to correct injustices *until we are the ones getting the short end of the stick!*

Somebody has said that in this flawed and sinful world, sometimes the closest we can come to fulfilling Jesus’ command to *love one another* is to see that a person is treated fairly and squarely – that justice is done.

The psalms ring out, “God rules the world with justice!” Ultimately, God does! And when His kingdom fully comes, the scales of justice will all be balanced properly. But in the meantime, Christian believers are to try to bring some of that kingdom justice into our own little sphere of life – to care as much that *the people around us* get a fair shake as we do that *we* get treated fairly!

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