

From Genesis to Jesus: Unveiling the Heart of God — Justice/Righteousness
Psalm 146
Covenant Church
July 5, 2026

MBI: Because God is righteous and enacts perfect justice, I can step into ever greater expressions of bringing about his justice.

FCF: I long for God's justice and righteousness.

CRW: Christ justifies me and sends me out to bring about his justice in the world.

Introduction

Arouse Attention

I'm always a little apprehensive when I pick up the phone to talk or chat with customer service.

Surface FCF

We've all played the game where we invest a lot of time with someone just to find out that they cannot, in fact, solve our problem. So we're sent along to someone else where this drama plays out again.

Connect to Audience

It's frustrating, right?

Customer service is just a small example, but what about places in our lives and world where there are serious, significant problems that need addressed. Where do you go for life's customer service? Is there a manager available who can actually speak to these issues? Who can actually help where there is significant, deep need?

Introduce Topic/Scripture

Join me in Psalm 146 with me. Today in our series about the Heart of God in the Old Testament, we're going to get a glimpse at God's heart for Justice and Righteousness through the eyes of Psalm 146.

Psalm 146 Context

Psalm 146 was most likely written some 400 years before Christ during some tough days for the people of God. A small group had just returned from Exile to rebuild God's Temple and it didn't always go smoothly.

The Old Testament tells us how economic stability in the region was rocky, the priesthood was sloppy in their duties, and the people mixed the true worship of YHWH with neighboring pagan worship.

As was so often the case, the faithful people of God took steps to remember who God is and set that before the community in formative ways. Psalm 146 is one example.

That's the purpose of the book of Psalms.

Some are very, very old: Psalm 90 is by Moses, composed 3400 years ago.

Many were composed by David or those related to him 1000 years before Christ.

Still others, as ours today, come after the Exile.

Some were written for public worship, others were private prayers. But all of them are to teach us how to walk in YHWH's ways, in blessed relationship with him.

A prominent theme, one which the Hymn of Psalm 146 speaks so clearly on, is God's heart for justice and righteousness.

Follow along as I read Psalm 146. I'm reading from the NIV

Point 1: Able & Willing

The psalm begins with praise, and then a call to stir up the self to lifelong worship. Then in verse 3 we're reminded of an all-too-familiar temptation - that of placing our ultimate trust in powerful people instead of God.

Two reasons the psalm identifies as why God is trustworthy instead of powerful people.

Firstly, God is able to help.

Inverses 3 through 6 the psalm paints a vivid contrast. On one hand, a powerful prince. On the other, the God of Israel.

Princes and powerful people ultimately lack power. They are unable to bring about their plans and promises. Why? The psalm tells us it is because they're mortal. They can hatch great plans and have noble purposes, but all those can come to a screeching halt in the chaos and disruption that ensues when a ruler dies.

Contrast that with the God of Israel.

God, here, is called the God of Jacob and YHWH. This reminds the people that God is the one who has bound himself to the family of Abraham by legal contract. He's the one who has been faithful to his promises to this family for thousands of years.

The psalmist also calls him Creator. At first I was left scratching my head. "What does God being creator have to do with his trustworthiness?"

John Calvin, a pastor and theologian from the 1500's, helped me make sense of it. Identifying that Israel's God is the Creator points to the unmatched greatness of his power.

What other being can create all things from nothing? Certainly not princes. Certainly not powerful people in high positions with grand plans and intentions. Calvin said this fact should swallow up all our fears.

He says, “As it is not enough that God is merely able to help us, but as a promise is further necessary, to the effect that he is willing and shall...”

And that’s the second reason the psalm identifies God to be the one who is trustworthy instead of powerful people. God is willing to help.

We see this in the way verses 7 through 9 speak of his tender mercies for the lowly and his actions against the wicked.

His actions pouring out mercy to the lowly and stopping the plans of the wicked come from the core of who he is, his very heart.

Transition: God’s ability to help comes from his power. God’s willingness to help comes from his heart. What is that aspect of his heart which moves God to do those things we see in verses 7-9?

Point 2: God’s Heart

Verse 8 tells us. “The LORD loves the righteous.” It is his love for righteousness which moves God to do all those things we see in verses 7-9. It is his love for righteousness which ought move us to trust him over and above all earthly princes and powerful people.

Let’s spend some time here. God’s love for righteousness, his righteous heart is a key theme we see throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

In our day and age, we often think of righteousness simply as moral purity. But God’s righteousness, Biblical righteousness encompasses far more.

Righteousness is a standard. It’s a standard measuring whether relationships are the way the Creator ordered them. It’s a standard God has set.

Think of it in four dimensions: God-You, You-Me, You-Self, and You-Nature.

When things are right in those four dimensions, there’s peace, well-being, and abundant life. God is glorified, people are thriving, and creation blossoms. This is what God created in Eden. Paradise. Righteousness reigned.

God’s heart, from Genesis to Revelation, is that righteousness, true right-ness in those four dimensions will reign.

But we know that doesn’t always happen. And that’s where Justice comes in.

If righteousness is the standard, then justice is the action taken to get the situation up to the standard. If righteousness is the standard, then justice is the action taken to get the situation up to the standard.

Just yesterday many celebrated the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In this historical document we see this nation’s early leaders lay down a long list of ways the British Crown had neglected justice to its colonial subjects.

Our forbearers saw that left unchecked, sin and evil would devour people. So, they created a new system of government to enact justice. Their goal was to set hard boundaries around evil and sin; and within these boundaries a certain level of “right-ness” could reign.

Where the Crown had failed, they sought to bring a better justice to people here.

So, if righteousness is the standard, then justice is the action taken to get the situation up to the standard.

Biblical justice has two components: Restorative and Punitive. Let’s take a look at each.

Restorative justice is an expression of mercy, where God raises up the lowly.

Psalm 146:7-9b (ESV) give us examples:

[He] who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless

People ought not be oppressed, or without food, or imprisoned unfairly, or blind, or humiliated, or taken advantage of when traveling, or without family. These are all expressions of unrighteousness. When these things happen the standard established by the Creator is unmet!

God’s heart longs for those who are beaten down to be raised up and he enacts restorative justice to raise up the lowly to the Godly standard.

In tandem to God’s raising up the lowly, he also enacts the second side of Biblical justice: Punitive justice.

If Restorative Justice is God raising up the lowly, then punitive justice is God lowering the arrogant and wicked.

Listen to David’s prayer in Psalm 58 (NLT) as he pleads for God’s punitive justice.

1 Justice—do you rulers know the meaning of the word?
Do you judge the people fairly?
2 No! You plot injustice in your hearts.
You spread violence throughout the land.
6 Break off their fangs, O God!
Smash the jaws of these lions, O Lord!
7 May they disappear like water into thirsty ground.
Make their weapons useless in their hands.

David articulates something that many of us feel deeply. People who perpetuate unrighteousness, people who endorse the breaking down of God's standard ought to be lowered.

And Psalm 146 articulates that just as God is able and willing to raise the lowly, he is able and willing to lower the arrogant. Ps 146:9 says "...the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

Sometimes, God works within systems. Sometimes he works despite them. And sometimes it seems as though God's justice is delayed far too long, but we know it cannot be forever...because God loves righteousness.

Imagine, for one moment, you have fallen victim to one of those all-to-common scams, and there are very convincing ones out there. Say they take you for \$1,000.

How do you feel? Angry, embarrassed, shocked! Probably some mixture of all three.

Now, imagine you brought your scammer to court. The judge has heard both sides and determined that the scammer did in fact take your money under false pretenses. What does a judge who loves righteousness do?

He returns what was taken from you (that's restorative justice) and he punishes, lowers, the arrogant, wicked scammer.

Perhaps he gives you your \$1,000 back plus the legal fees and he sentences the scammer to some jail time because they crossed that righteous boundary that says, "You shall not lie to your neighbor. You shall not steal."

It's just an example, but it illustrates how Biblical justice works two levers, one lowering the wicked and the other raising the lowly, in order to bring about righteousness.

Transition: In every instance of Biblical justice, we see a need for someone to set things right. Someone with the authority and power needs to lift up the lowly and bring down the arrogant and wicked. Someone needs to set the world aright. Someone needs to make it all new again.

In the pages of the Old Testament we see God promise this person and in the pages of the New Testament we see him fully unveil God's heart for justice and righteousness. That person is Jesus Christ.

Point 3: Righteousness Reigns

Listen to how the Old Testament anticipates Him. Isaiah 42:1-4 (NIV)

- 1 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
- 2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
4 he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands [that is, even those farthest away] will put their hope.”

God’s special Servant, Jesus, came to usher in the Kingdom of God, that is where all four dimensions are put aright. God-You, You-Me, You-Self, and You-Nature. are all being put back in order under his Reign as King.

What sin, rebellion, and wickedness has marred, God promises to remake in true righteousness.

You and I are living in the time where Jesus’ reign as Righteous King is still expanding, it’s still going out to those who are farthest away.

A famous date in history is June 6 1944. Working together, the Allied forces invaded Axis-occupied Europe in order to set the continent free from unrighteous rule.

The world knew that from the moment Allied forces hit the beaches, the clock was ticking to the fall of the Axis reign in Europe. IF the overwhelming Allied forces could get a beachhead, then nothing could hold back the Axis’ demise. Victory on June 6th meant inevitable defeat for the Axis in view of such overwhelming moral, industrial, and personnel power.

In a similar way, you and I live in between Jesus’ first coming to establish the kingdom of God and his second coming when he will bring about the final obliteration to all unrighteousness, injustice, and wickedness.

Christ has won the decisive victory on the cross! His death in the place of his people absorbed God’s just, righteous wrath for our sin. With all hostilities between God and his people removed, God now pours out his Spirit to set about his work of expanding the Kingdom to the farthest reaches of the world. The clock is ticking...Liberation Day for the World is only a matter of time.

So, how do you and I live as citizens of the Kingdom of God where true righteousness and justice has been inaugurated, but we inhabit a world waiting for it’s final liberation? How do we live in a world where injustice and unrighteousness exist simultaneously alongside the kingdom of God?

First, we set our Hope on Christ’s return.

God has established governments for people’s good here, but they are imperfect placeholders until Christ will reign uncontested. No earthly justice can bring us what we long for, God’s righteousness.

So, we live knowing our hope for true righteousness and justice comes completely with Jesus’ return.

Until then, we must live in an unjust world where unrighteousness exists for a while. If it makes you feel out of place, that’s because it is. It does not belong here and our King, Christ Jesus, has promised to expel it completely at his second return.

So, in a world where justice isn't perfect, set your hope on Christ's return.

Second, we wait with patience.

With our hope set on Jesus' return and his promise to make all things right, we wait for his timing. Long though it may be, we trust that God's plan is far better than our own.

Contrast two different kinds of passengers on a bus or train journey. An elderly couple and a group of boys having spent their whole day in school.

The boys are wound, like a spring, incessantly asking the driver, "How much longer!?"

The elderly couple waits, with patience, confident in the driver and the route. They are assured of their final destination.

God's Spirit produces patience in our lives as we hope for Christ's return. Cultivate patience by renewing your mind daily with his Word and with prayer. When you find yourself getting impatient, longing to ask, "How much longer?!" pour your heart out to him in prayer and trust afresh in his timing.

He will meet you there.

Third, we embrace our roles as Kingdom Ambassadors.

Once brought into the Kingdom of God we are not only called to sit, hope, and wait. No, we get busy with the work of the kingdom. We get busy doing justice to bring about God's righteousness.

I think about folks at Covenant who volunteer with CASA: Court-Appointed Special Advocate, and give of their time to advocate for abused and neglected children in the court system.

I think about those on the Senior Visitation Team who go out to minister to dear saints who can no longer make it to church.

I think about folks volunteering at Murdock Elementary through Engage Local. These folks help bring resources to an under-resourced part of our community.

I think about dear sisters, like Beth and Duease, who organize household item giveaway to bless international scholars and students.

I think about Hannah in DCS and Andy in the Public Defender's Office, who serve as lawyers to bring about justice for the least of these.

I think about WAVES and how the children raised money for Isaiah 117 House. I think about Plunge and how high schoolers put on a VBS for Romney Meadows.

These are simply examples, but there are numerous ways big and small you can be about raising up the lowly and lowering the arrogant as a Kingdom Ambassador.

With our hope set on Christ's return, we wait with patience, and embrace our role as Kingdom Ambassadors. With our hope set on Christ's return, we wait with patience, and embrace our role as Kingdom Ambassadors.

Conclusion

Psalm 146 tells us of God's heart for righteousness through justice. The psalm is bookended with 2 "Praise the Lord"!s

As we think about our God who is truly able and willing to bring about righteousness, let's end our worship service with our praise by calling out to our Holy God who reigns forever!