

Restoring Justice at Home

Micah 6:6-8

Dr. Matt Cassidy, Cathy Ellison --- June 14, 2020

Good morning, Grace. I'm glad you could join us today. I would like to change the gears a little on going through the Bible in a year and have a family conversation about all the craziness and the chaos that's happening around the world, in our country, and even in our own cities—sometimes in our own living rooms. It appears that politics and the media are poisoning our ability to have a rational conversation, to know what to think and what to do. And it seems as though the wildest or the loudest voice gets that spotlight. Let's stop that. Because as believers, we know this. We want justice and love and mercy to every single image bearer in the world. And we want to be part as a church of making that happen. And I know you're probably thinking and even feeling, *What can the Christians at Grace Covenant Church do to make a change? How can we use our voice? What can the Christians at Grace Covenant Church do to help every single child in this city have a bright and better future?* Let's have a conversation about what to do with the grief that we experience and the sorrow and even the anger that we're having.

There was a time in Israel's history where there was a moment of national crisis. They had rejected God and they were trying to make things right. And in this context of this story, Micah was the prophet. And he just goes to God and says, "What do we do? How do we get back? How do we do this right? YHWH, tell us ... tell us." And he says this in Micah chapter 6, verse 6: "What shall I do to come before YHWH and bow down before this exalted God? Shall I come to you with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will YHWH be pleased with a thousand rams ... or how about ten thousand rivers of olive oil? What if I offered my firstborn to You?" And you can see how he's gone to using hyperbole. *I'll do whatever.*

Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does YHWH require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

And this is the answer that has become quite famous in the last month. He gives us an answer of how all of humanity is to act. He says, “He has shown you, O mortal, O man, what is good. What does YHWH require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Justice

To “act justly” ... I hope you’ve seen the video that we’ve posted on social media on our links to the Bible Project, the definition of justice. To act justly ... It can be a retribution justice, a legal system of an eye for an eye. You probably know that phrase, “an eye for an eye.” And that’s actually a statement of justice, that if you do something that costs ten dollars’ wrong to somebody, you pay them back ten dollars, and maybe ten dollars with a fine. But if you bounce a check, you don’t get killed. The government doesn’t have that kind of power of injustice.

But also, there is restorative justice. And that means that we become advocates and protectors of those who are oppressed or vulnerable. And so, you see throughout the Bible that God brings up those who are the oppressed: the widow, the orphan, the alien, and the poor. And the reason He distinguishes that group of people is because they are especially vulnerable to injustice. And why is that? Here’s why. Because there is a bully inside every son of Adam and daughter of Eve. And bullies do what bullies do. They look for the weakest person to pick on. Or they look for someone that’s not like them. And they pounce on them. Justice bridles the bully.

Mercy

“Act justly. Love mercy.” Love mercy—that word mercy, that’s our word. We studied it a few weeks ago. That’s the *hessed* word. And that type of mercy, remember, is a commitment. It has a cost associated with it. It means that you can’t just sit down on the sidelines while you

watch someone else being taken advantage of. When you see suffering take place, you run towards that to make sure that's right. That's what it means to love mercy.

Humility

“... and to walk humbly with our Lord.” This is interesting. This word “humbly”—it’s the only time it’s used in the older Testament. It’s somewhat of a new word. If you look at the culture during Micah’s time and then later on with the Greeks and the Romans, humility is a vice, not a virtue. It is a sign of weakness, not strength. But he says, “Walk humbly with the Lord” because you’re made in the Lord’s image, in YHWH’s image, and YHWH is a humble God. He is in the form of God and He comes in the form of man. He humbles Himself and becomes in the form of man, even to the point of death, death on the cross. And that was to show the power of humility. Jesus changed the very meaning of that word. And when we walk humbly with our Lord, we say truthfully, “Search me, O God. Know my heart. What’s in there? Do I have this vileness inside of me? Am I humble enough to take responsibility for that?”

This is what the Lord expects. To act justly, and to love mercy, and walk humbly with Him. It’s the narrative of the entire human experience. It is what we are to be doing to every single image-bearer. In the image of God, He made man, male and female. Every people, every tribe, every nation, everything. Everyone is treated with equal dignity just like the Trinity interacts. And they’re all serving each other. The Father serves the Son and the Son serves the Spirit and the Spirit serves the Father. That’s how we’re to act with one another.

Sin Is the Root of Evil

And what’s great about what we get to talk about in the Church is we get to talk about the root of all of this evil that’s taking place, because we have revelation from God. We know the full story. We know the full problem here because God revealed that to us. Racial inequality, racism itself, injustice, prejudice, that root is sin. And when we talk about sin, we’re talking about sin in the human heart. And in the Bible, it says there is sin in the culture, the world. And we live in two realms. There’s a spirit world. And part of the spirit world is evil and wicked and sinful.

The first expression of violence in the Bible is when Cain looks at Abel and glares at him. And God comes and intercedes and says, “Cain, sin is crouching at your door and its desire is to devour you.” Listen to that. Sin is a predator. It’s not ambiguous. It’s pursuing us. It is hiding behind. It is sleuth-filled. It is looking for opportunities to devour all things beautiful, all things godly. Sin is anti-justice. It is anti-mercy. It is anti-humility. And Paul says our battle is not against flesh and blood. It is against principalities and powers and rulers that are out to fight over who has a right to rule. Does God Almighty, YHWH the Sovereign God, rule in our hearts, in our families, in our city, in our nation, in the world? And that is a spiritual world going on.

And what we saw in that video with George Floyd is especially disgusting because the person involved in the assault is wearing a uniform. He is an official of justice. And he is cruel—no, he is vicious. And you can see he is just smug with power as a man pleads for his life. And in that you see there is no justice, there is no mercy, there is no humility. Cain kills Abel again. It was a spiritual war. We saw. You can’t do that without the help of sin crouching at the door and devouring.

So, we’re a church. We know better. We know that we’re in a war and it’s not just physical. It is about the nature of the human heart. It is about the culture itself. It is about the demons and the devil himself that want to ruin all those things.

And we see the madness. That’s one of the things that’s taking place here, is the madness. Are you trying to make sense out of this and you can’t? Here’s why. Because you can’t. The devil only uses reason when it’s convenient for his cause. Mostly he just wants to get us amped up on emotion so we can get drunk and distracted. Because it is through our distraction and, again, these wild emotions that we might be carrying, that he divides us. That’s his strategy. He is out to divide those things that are sacred from God—divide the Church, and divide families. That’s what he’s doing.

The idea of sitting down in respectful conversation, that we could reason and listen and learn and seek to understand—that is what the devil is afraid of. And I think the sin inside of our soul is afraid of that.

So, let’s do that. Let’s do that. Let’s have a calming conversation about justice and mercy and humility. Let’s discuss with one another how we can care for people, people that are in need, people who don’t look like us. And I did that. I did that this week. I’ve brought a friend to help us discuss that.

This is Cathy Ellison. She'll introduce herself and I'll be back after that.

Interview with Cathy Ellison

Matt: Listen, I want to let you know about a wonderful opportunity we have before us. Cathy Ellison is here and we're friends. We traveled to Israel together and then we're friends for life. And I've been talking to Cathy throughout the week since the death of George Floyd and how we can respond and some of the things that are happening around our city and around even the world now, and how we can play a part. Cathy comes to us with a vast knowledge because of her experience. And I'll start with having her introduce herself and we'll see how lucky we are to have her with us today. Cathy, tell us about yourself.

Cathy: I'll be glad to. I don't know whether it's lucky or not, but I'll tell you. I'm from a small town near Lockhart—it's called Dale. And after graduating from high school I went to Southwest Texas, now Texas State. After graduating with a degree, three months later I joined the Austin Police Department. And from there I stayed and promoted my way up and finally became interim chief for about eighteen months before Chief Acevedo—between Chief Knee and Chief Acevedo. And then I retired in October of 2008.

Matt: And when you joined the force you were the first black female on the force in the Austin Police Department.

Cathy: That is correct. There had been others that had tried but got terminated or quit or whatever the situation was, but I'm a country girl and I can take some things, so I stayed to the end.

Matt: Right.

Cathy: There were forty-six people in our cadet class. There were two black women and one black male and only two of us graduated—one black woman and one black male. The other lady quit.

Matt: Well, so you were at APD for thirty years, so you've seen Austin change dramatically, just economically and socioeconomically and even demographically.

Cathy: Yes.

Matt: And you've seen Austin radically change as well even in racial issues. As a member of the Police Department, that must have been quite an experience.

Cathy: Yes, when I came to Austin there was no MoPac, and so Burnet Road was kind of our northern boundary. And when you join the police department you immediately go to patrol—everybody goes to patrol. That's the first question they ask a woman: "Did you go on patrol?" I say, "Of course!" So, I was on patrol northwest. Never had lived in Austin. I had been here with my parents but not on a regular basis. We would slip up here and go to a club when I was in college, but in was in east [Austin], and so, I came northwest and it was not a pleasant experience. And so, I asked to get to east Austin, because at the time that's where most black people lived. And sure enough, that was true. People may not believe it, but east Austin was booming. Stores and movie theaters and things for black people because they were all pushed to the east of I-35.

Matt: Right. So, we're a predominantly white church and yet here you are. How did you end up coming to Grace Covenant Church and what makes you stay?

Cathy: Well, I think God tricked me. Because I was praying. I had been at my previous church for thirty years, since I came to Austin, basically. And so, I was praying. Things were not right in my soul. So, I had tried to leave my previous church once before and God sent me back. And I was there for another four years. And so, I just prayed. I said, "God, my spirit isn't right, my heart isn't right. This is not what where I need to be." So, I just asked for some guidance. And

after sitting at home for about six months and not going to church, my mom would say, “Have you gone to church yet?” I’d say, “No.”

Matt: *[Laughing]* Your mom is still saying, “Go to church”!

Cathy: She said, “Are you going to church?” I said, “No.” And so, I knew that Grace was here, and I had come here once before a long time ago, but this building wasn’t here. I think it must have been in the worship center, I mean ...

Matt: ... the auditorium.

Cathy: ... the auditorium. And there was someone from Bible Study Fellowship who invited me to an event. So, I said, “Well, I’m just going to go to Grace.” And so, when I walked in, I said, “Okay, God, are you sure this is the place where I’m supposed to be?” And not because of the race, but because it was such a big church. My home church had maybe fifty people, the previous church had maybe two hundred, and here I am coming to a church that has thousands of people, it seemed like. And so, I wanted a church, I prayed for a church that taught the Bible and not just talked about God, but about Jesus Christ and Him being our Savior. So, I said, “I’m going to get into some of these disciple classes. They’ll be smaller and I’ll get to know people.” I go in and there’s one hundred and fifty people, the size of my regular church. But I’ve figured my way through it.

Matt: Right. Well, talking about race and racial relations is not an easy conversation to have. And why is it worth having?

Cathy: Well, I think it’s about learning about each other. I think that sometimes people say things they shouldn’t say, but if you know their history and more about them, you’re liable not to say those things or do those things. But I think it’s an asset knowing about people from different cultures and other races. We get to enjoy each other’s company, each other’s food, each other’s music. And so, we’re talking about it at a time where there’s kind of an uproar, but I think it’s a

conversation that all churches need to have because most churches are segregated and I think it's just an uncomfortable conversation to have.

Matt: And it's worth having because—what did you say in your police training you had ...

Cathy: Yeah, we had different groups go—different cadets is what we called them when we were in training—to talk to different segments of the community. And the main theme of most of them is just “accept us, don't tolerate us.” And so, I thought that was a great thing to say, just accept me for who I am with all my flaws and my race and my culture, and don't just tolerate me.

Matt: Right. And I think the Bible teaches believers, because everyone's in the image of God, to not just accept and tolerate, but to enjoy and drink in the differences.

Cathy: Yes.

Matt: God loves diversity—just look around. So, to not tolerate, not accept, but to enjoy and embrace.

Cathy: Yes, I agree.

Matt: So how do we help—how can we be better at loving brothers and sisters and members of our culture that aren't the same color.

Cathy: I think it's exactly the same way as you would love any other Christian. Be kind and considerate and compassionate, but just know that we're all made in the image of Jesus and of God and therefore treat each other the same way. I don't think the love is any different. I think sometimes people aren't really sure what to say or do, like I said earlier. But if you just love me as Cathy—get to know me and love me as Cathy—I'm talking about the *agape* kind of love that God has for us.

Matt: Okay. But I've got to ask you ... *[Laughter]*

Cathy: I know you do.

Matt: Like what things do we say that kind of bug you that we shouldn't say. Could you just help me—help me be nice?

Cathy: Sure. Don't say—when I walk into a room, “I don't see color.”

Matt: What does that mean?

Cathy: That means that you don't see me. Because every time I go into a room I know I'm black. So, you don't have to say, “Hey, Cathy.” But you need to admit that there are other people in the room other than you. And then I don't like it when people say, “You're articulate” or “You talk like you're a white person.” And I don't quite know what that means. I'm still trying to figure that out.

Matt: Right. But it's condescending.

Cathy: It is condescending.

Matt: And the person saying it might mean well, but it is not received well.

Cathy: It is not received well.

Matt: ... at all. That's very helpful, by the way. So, what can the church do in the context of our city? How can our church help our city, how can the church become better citizens in the context of the police violence that we've seen, and what needs to change? And how can we do that within the church itself?

Cathy: Getting involved, in whatever aspect that is for you. If it's attending a rally or one of the protests, attend. Vote. Everybody can vote. The elections are coming up for city council and some run-offs are coming up, but people don't really care about voting unless it's a national election. But the policies and decisions that affect your city are made at the City Council level.

Matt: Right.

Cathy: And because we have districts, you just need to learn who your city council person is. You can write them letters, you can send them e-mails, you can give them calls. But we just encourage you to participate in city government.

Matt: Well, I think one thing you said earlier was that if you want good police, refer church members.

Cathy: Yes, that's right. Recruiting. I mean, we have the hardest time finding police officers, good police officers. So, if you know someone that you think would make an excellent police officer because you know them, you know their character, refer them to recruiting. They might not have even thought about being a police officer. But once they go in and see what the qualifications are ... and you can make a great impact by being a police officer.

Matt: You know, it never occurred to me until just this moment ... what if all the churches in Austin wanted to place officers in those one hundred and thirty spots that are available coming up ...

Cathy: Yes.

Matt: ... and they were all members of the body of Christ all over the city and wanted to serve God and make God proud, that would be a whole department change.

Cathy: It would be. But you know, there are a lot of Christian police officers. I know if they still do, but the Austin Police Department had a Christian group of Bible-studying police officers that

were led by a chaplain. And they still have chaplains who were ministers of various churches. And that's how they get involved too. They counsel the officers, they make recommendations, and so, they're in there. You can volunteer at the police department. But recruiting is a big thing, a really big thing.

Matt: So, how could we help some of our people in law enforcement, whether it's the Highway Patrol or some of the guards or even the Austin Police Department, do you think?

Cathy: Right, because DPS is there all the time standing in front of the Capitol. They're standing too with all that stuff going on. Prayer works at all times, and that's something that most churches are probably doing anyway, is praying. But you know, just find a police officer in your neighborhood. Show your appreciation. There's an officer that works here that talked about how protesters are watching them leave and following them home and know where they're living. So, she's asking people to look after her house. And so, it's just those kinds of things. Even if you just take a meal and leave it on their front porch and show any of those kinds of things you could help with. But just show them that not everybody is like the man who knelt on George Floyd.

Matt: Right. What can the church do to help expand our understanding of racial relationships and become involved in celebrating the differences?

Cathy: I think that a couple of years ago out of a women's Bible study class, *Counterculture*, we did a class on racial reconciliation. It was called *Be a Bridge*. I think that class should be each semester. It talks about being aware, acknowledging that you've sinned and asking for repentance. Because everybody has something in your heart that probably has something to do with a bias. And you may not recognize it, but that's what they ask you to do. There is a book and it's called *Be a Bridge*. The full title is *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*, and it's by Latasha Morrison, who is a black female that lived in Austin for a long time but moved to Atlanta. And there's a Facebook group that you can join, and they have a discussion about the same thing. It's constant.

And another book that you all are already reading is called *White Awake*. And it says *An Honest Look at What it Means to Be White*. And somebody may want to buy that book and read

it themselves. And there are some videos on. And you can also—most people know Michael Eric Dyson. He just recently wrote a book called *Tears We Cannot Stop*. And it's a sermon about white America. And so, I think that's a good book along with—we talked about the citizens' police academy and just getting involved. But those are good resources.

Matt: How do we pray for our city and our law enforcement? In other words, how do you pray? You were praying on Saturday with your sorority and you got together and had a moment where you kneeled for eight minutes and forty-six seconds and then you prayed. How do you pray? We want to pray like that.

Cathy: Well, we prayed specifically-- a couple of things—we prayed for the Floyd family.

Matt: Right.

Cathy: ... for them to feel God's comfort and peace. And then we prayed for the city. It was in turmoil and stores were being destroyed, so we prayed for protection and peace for the officers as well as all the protesters. We prayed for God's justice to be done, whatever that looks like. And then we prayed for each other. We prayed for the building up of the police officers because we know they're tired. But we prayed for this city to heal and to close the racial divide. Because things like this have been going on a long time.

Matt: So, this is a personal question, but I feel like I would love to know the answer and it would serve our congregation well. In light of your upbringing, in light of being the first black female and the stories that go along with that, and then seeing what you see on TV, how do you keep from being bitter?

Cathy: Well, you know, my faith is the biggest thing. Even when I was interim chief I would come in, close my door, and I would pray for the day. I'd pray over my office. I'd say, "Satan, you're not going to have your way today." It was probably foolish, but I did. I wanted to make good decisions, I wanted to make sure, especially if I was about to terminate somebody, those kinds of things, to make sure I was doing the right thing. But it's just my faith. And I think that

probably eighty percent of police work is good work. I loved being a police officer. I loved being on patrol, I loved the interaction. People might not have liked that when I gave them a ticket--- somebody told me that I stopped them twenty years ago and gave them a ticket. I have no idea, I don't know anything about that. I probably did. But I loved the interaction, I love talking to them and them asking questions, but I liked being on patrol. It's probably my favorite part of the job. It's less political because you can just take your calls, do the best that you can and go on.

But then I had good friends that were not police officers. So, you have to have stuff away from the police department, whether it was your church or my sorority, whatever it is, you have to other stuff to do.

Matt: Right. Well, again, I feel like you're a great example of a person that has persevered over a long period of time in a very difficult position in a lot of different ways, and I think you have exemplified becoming like Christ in all of life and becoming like Christ in your career. That's a great value here.

Cathy: Thank you.

Matt: Thank you for joining us today.

Cathy: Oh, my pleasure.

Matt: We'll talk to you again maybe. Okay?

Cathy: Uh-huh.

I told you. It's a calming, softening conversation. It's reasonable with open hearts. And when I saw the tape after I'd done it and then we played it to some of the staff and the leadership, they all said it was so soothing. That's what evil, that's what sin, wants to keep us from enjoying, is coming together, time and time again, and saying, *How do we learn?*

I mean, I loved when she said, people of color don't want to just be tolerated, they want to be accepted. No, that's not where we stop at church, right? We celebrate and enjoy and embrace the differences. The way God made us was purposeful. How do we love people of color? Well, you love them like everyone else. You seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things ... seek the kingdom. Love His people. "When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was hungry you gave me food. When I was naked you clothed me." Yeah. Independent of color. Right.

Application

Grace, here's what I want to bring to the conversation. I think this is a significant moment in American history and in the history of the American church. And I don't want us to get distracted by the violence and the crazies, to take our eye off the real possibility that this could be one of those moments. Moments happen when men and women of God work diligently for years and sometimes for decades and then there's a trigger.

William Wilberforce worked for over a decade on trying to end slave trade. And then a moment happened and it was ended. Slavery in this country ended in a moment. There was a moment when a little woman with a giant roar changed our country when Rosa Parks said, "I'm not going to sit in the back of the bus." This is a moment and we need to grasp this.

How do we do it? How do we play our part? We start with humility, with this acknowledgement that we're not adequate. I'm not adequate to talk about this, but we have to talk about this. We must. And it is going to be messy. I have every expectation that we're going to make a lot of mistakes. We have to be extremely patient so as we don't run away from something and so that we don't run into something just because we're full of zeal. We have to be humble about this and courageous.

Pray

But here's what we do. First, we pray. We pray a lot. And I hope you noticed that Cathy mentioned at least two times that she gets strength and that her application in life is to pray. And why did she say that? Because Cathy is a godly woman. And she knows how this spiritual world works. She knows she's in a battle that's not about flesh and blood, and she brings that to us. The

root of this is sin. It is sin in the human soul, it is sin in the culture, it is sin and evil in a spiritual world.

And we're not praying as a cop out, so that we pray and not do anything else. We're praying because we're being strategic in a spiritual war and we need to know the mind of God. We need to know what to do and how to do it, and how to recognize the enemy and his ways so that we don't do something full of zeal, but something rather ignorant. We need to pray. The battle belongs to the Lord.

Pray—pray. By yourself in your devotional time, pray with your small group, pray as a church. Pray.

Learn

The second thing we can do is learn. There's a book that we're suggesting that everybody read to get together, and we're going to have small groups together. The book title is called *White Awake*. I'm not a big fan of the title, but the author does a very good job of walking us through an experience of what it means to be white and maybe a little bit ignorant of what has happened in the past and currently with people of color and particularly African Americans.

Melissa Eckel is our Director of Women's Ministry and she sought out multiple different educational experiences for the women's group—this is months before George Floyd was murdered—but she came up with this application of *White Awake* for this summer previous. And then we discussed it as a staff and said, "Let's do it churchwide. Let's meet in groups and learn about justice. And it's a book that's not condescending and self-righteous. Six weeks, a small group, meeting virtually. Maybe some of the groups might choose to meet with a safe distance. They're co-ed. And the space is limited, so you need to go on our website and see what it says and how you can get involved in that. *White Awake*, that's a good resource.

Another one is *Strength of Love*, the sermons from Martin Luther King while he was in prison. This is sometimes a textbook for people, well, in Kevin's case (our youth pastor), in seminary they read that book. Good book.

Serve

The third one is a ministry called Education Connection. Our church has been involved in this for over a year and so have multiple churches around the city of Austin. Let me tell you

about it. You can change a generation by involving yourself in Education Connection. Closing the gap between people of color and people with privilege—the most single important issue is education. There is a significant fork in the road between third and fifth grade in the educational experience. If a third, fourth, or fifth grader can read, they are probably bound for college. If a third, fourth, or fifth grader cannot read, they are bound for poverty. And black and brown people are more likely to end up in prison.

Here's how you can change a generation. You get involved in this ministry that goes into the schools during the school time and they help children learn how to read. Sometimes learning how to read is not a value in the home. It could be for various reasons. It could be a value or the parents don't know how to read, for example, and they want to help their children but they can't. "When I was thirsty, you gave me water." When my child couldn't read, you came and tutored them. And if we get involved in this ministry, then we can change a generation. We can shatter this pipeline to prisons and build a superhighway towards college and a future and change and raise the tide of a whole people group. It's just a few hours a week once school gets going again. Melinda did it this last semester and she was very blessed by it. She served her community that way. Let's do that together when we get started again. We'll tell you more about it. You can look into it now.

Here's how I want to end, Grace. Every believer is a minister. This is our moment to thrive. We are not going to be afraid. We will be courageous. We are not going to be proud. We will be humble. We are not going to be distracted. We'll be focused. Because we know that this is a spiritual war and the battle belongs to the Lord. Let's engage.

Let's pray.

O Sovereign God, could it be that before time began it was your plan to put this church on this hill with a crown and a scepter so that all of Austin would know that You rule? That You have authority, and in Your authority, there is justice, there's an eradication of injustice? And this church must play her part in making that happen. We realize that this battle is not flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and rulers in the spiritual realm. It is about a battle of the sin bent in our souls to be bullies. And God, I'd ask that we would be a church that rises to this occasion, that we would open our eyes, if that's what we need to do; that we would serve those who need this kind of service; that we would be discerning in how we serve and where we

serve. Lord, let us be in this moment; that while this real estate—squirrels running around two hundred years ago, planting acorns for the beautification of this campus—You had in mind maybe this very thing: a church that believes that every believer is a priest and a prophet and an agent of justice and mercy and humility. God, let us be that individually and collectively so that we might please you by showing the spirit world that as for me and my house and this church, we will serve the Lord. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for joining us in a family conversation. I hope you were blessed.