

## Mercy & Justice In Psalms & Proverbs

**Memory Text:** “Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked.” (Psalm 82:3, 4)

**Setting The Stage:** Supreme Court Justice Horace Gray (of the 19<sup>th</sup> C) once informed a man who had appeared before him in a lower court and had escaped conviction on a technicality, "I know that you are guilty and you know it, and I wish you to remember that one day you will stand before a better and wiser Judge, and that there you will be dealt with according to justice and not according to law."

Surprised while burgling a house in Antwerp, Belgium, the thief fled out the back door, clambered over a nine-foot wall, dropped down the other side, and found himself in the city prison.

Whether now or later, justice will be delivered. And one day we will all have to stand before the Judge of the entire universe and give an account of how we lived our lives, what we did with our time, talents, and treasure's, and what we did for Jesus in the person of the less fortunate.

We'll be delving in to Psalms and Proverbs today. Both books depict the experience of living with God in the common things of life, not just in times of worship or in other religious activities. These books make it clear that our faith should make a difference in every aspect of our lives, because God cares about every aspect of our lives, including the injustice that pervades life.

### Sunday – Psalms: Songs Of Hope for The Oppressed

Psalm 9:7-9, 13-20

God sees and hears people who are in distress and trouble. Most often in the Psalms we hear those cries from people who have trusted in God but are not seeing justice done. These Psalms are songs, and in spite of the fact that their faith is being tried, they are still singing. They still have hope.

**Psalm 9:7-9:** But the Lord shall endure forever; He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness, and He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness. The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” (cp vv. 13-20)

**Can you feel the tension between God's faithfulness and David's present experience?** On one hand he is exultant in God's faithful judgment. The next he prays for deliverance from those who seek to do him harm. The idea of a future reckoning

brings some relief in the present when you're being mistreated, but waiting for that time isn't a picnic, especially when it seems things are getting worse.

**How can we deal with the struggle of faith in God and times of severe trial?** David always comes back to the hope and promise of God's good and just judgment. It is important for us to do this as well. Don't doubt it, but count on it!

**Is judgment a good thing?** For the abused and accused, for the defenseless, it is. It comes as good news to know that wrongs will be righted. The humble and those who trust in and wait on God rejoice in coming judgment from the viewpoint that justice will be done (ref Ps. 73:17).

It is in the heart of God to right wrongs. Should it be in ours also?

## **Monday – “Do Something, God!”**

Psalm 82

**What is Psalm 82 (cp. Ps. 58; Isa. 3:13-15) saying?** This is God's arraignment of the unjust judges (“gods”) who are bearing sway over Israel. The psalm is divided in three parts: (1) God as Supreme Judge; (2) God denouncing unjust judges and corrupt judgment; (3) the psalmist imploring God to rise in judgment.

The Israelites at times failed to live up to God's ideals. Leaders and judges looked only after themselves. Their favors could be purchased with bribes. Without the court to protect them, ordinary people, especially the poor, were subjected to exploitation. Psalm 82 is a response to such a situation.

The later years of Jehoshaphat's reign were largely spent in strengthening the national and spiritual defenses of Judah. One of the important steps taken by the king was the establishment and maintenance of efficient courts of justice. He gave the judges a charge:

**2 Chronicles 19: 5-7:** “Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Now therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes.” (cp vv. 9-11)

Have you ever been the victim of injustice? God forbid that we are the one profiting from injustice. If courts won't take our case, there is a much higher court you can appeal to—(not the Supreme Court, but God's throne of justice.

## **Tuesday – A Kings' Promise**

Psalm 101

**Psalm 101.** Here we have a condensed list of the principles that guide a person in authority. These verses are of special interest to parents in “Guarding the interests of the home” (CT 119). Verses 1-4 concern the private life; verses 5-8, how one is to conduct their public activities. It’s a beautiful expression of the nobility of soul of King David.

Although few of us are in public positions of authority, we all have roles in life in which we might have the opportunity to influence and encourage others. Family life has already been mentioned, but it could also be in our working life, community involvement, or church.

Should we be prepared to suggest to public officials that they uphold these principles? This isn’t getting political. We might define it as speaking truth to power. If we care about how our city, county, state, or country is run, perhaps time could be taken, when necessary, to remind those who have positions of leadership over us of these important principles.

It was the mercy and justice of God that became the foundation for everything David sought to uphold by his leadership. He sought to learn and practice these characteristics in his life and work. This would mean he would have to resist the temptation toward wrongdoing, corruption, and dishonesty, all of which are special traps for people in power. To put a check on this, David recognized the importance of good counselors to help do right.

How can we fill our lives with influences that help us live and lead (where we can) with justice and mercy for those who need it?

### **Wednesday – Walking With The Lord**

Psalm 146

As we near the end of the book of Psalms, we notice that the exclamations of praise swell. The last five psalms begin with a simple and direct command to, “Praise the Lord.” Ps. 146, the first of these, has a particular focus on God’s concern for the poor and oppressed as a primary reason for praise. What is the message to us here?

**Psalm 146:1-10.** This psalm describes God’s continuing work in the world as judge, provider, liberator, healer, helper, and defender—all of these focused on people in specific need of these kinds of help. Sometimes we think caring for the needy is something we ought to do because God wants us to. But this psalm reminds us that this is something God already does, and we are invited to join with Him. When we work against poverty, oppression, disease, and speaking up for the defenseless, we are working with God and His purposes.

**1 Corinthians 3:9:** “For we are God’s fellow workers.”

Want a closer relationship with Jesus? Then one of the ways to enter into a closer walk with Him is by partnering with Him by bringing relief to the suffering.

*“The poverty of the people to whom we are sent is not to prevent us from working for them. Christ came to this earth to walk and work among the poor and suffering. They received the greatest share of His attention. And today, in the person of His children, He visits the poor and needy, relieving woe and alleviating suffering. Take away suffering and need, and we should have no way of understanding the mercy and love of God, no way of knowing the compassionate, sympathetic heavenly Father. Never does the gospel put on an aspect of greater loveliness than when it is brought to the most needy and destitute regions.”* (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 226)

When we work for those in need, God enlarges our heart, we enter into sympathy with Christ’s work, and we learn to live selflessly.

### **Thursday – Proverbs: Mercy On The Needy**

Proverbs 10:4; 13:23, 25; 14:31; 15:15, 16; 19:15, 17; 30:7-9

The book of Proverbs touches on a diverse range of topics and life experiences. Life isn’t simple and straightforward, and Proverbs alerts us to the different circumstances and choices that influence how life is lived, even among those who are faithful to God. **What does Proverbs have to say about the poor and needy?**

**Proverbs 10:4:** “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

**Proverbs 13:23, 25:** “Much food is in the fallow ground of the poor, and for lack of justice there is waste. The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the stomach of the wicked shall be in want.”

**Proverbs 14:31:** “He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.”

**Proverbs 15:15, 16:** “All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble.”

**Proverbs 19:15, 17:** “Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger. He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given.”

**Proverbs 30:7-9:** “Two things I request of You (deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—

feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say,  
“Who is the Lord?” Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.”

“Proverbs emphasizes the concern and attention God has for the poor and vulnerable. Sometimes people are poor because of circumstances, poor choices, or exploitation, but whatever the causes of their situation, the Lord is still described as their Creator (Prov. 22:2) and Defender (Prov. 22:22, 23). These people are not to be oppressed or taken advantage of, whatever their mistakes.

“While Proverbs does offer a better life through choosing wisdom and obeying God, riches are not always the result of God’s blessing. Faithfulness to God is always seen as more important and ultimately more rewarding than material gain: “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice” (Prov. 16:8, NIV).

“Proverbs is not only concerned with the lives of individuals but also offers insight as to how society as a whole should function for the benefit of all, particularly for those who need protection. We are reminded again that at their best, those who govern and lead do so with the help of God (see Prov. 8:15, 16) and should be acting as agents of His grace and compassion toward those in need.”

### **Friday – Summary**

The cry of the Psalms and the wisdom of Proverbs are that God does notice and will intervene to protect those too often ignored or exploited. And if that’s what God’s about, it’s what we should be about, as well.