

Week 32: *The Four Offices: Judge*

Hook



Main Point: Jesus is the perfect judge.

In the early 1960s, the United States was in a time of great unrest, as segregation and the Civil Rights movement were two staunchly opposed ideas within our nation. On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech titled “I Have a Dream.” In this speech, he referenced America’s founding principles in an effort to goad individuals of all backgrounds to stand for justice. Amid his words was the impactful line, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” As a result of this speech and the virtuous acts of many in our country, great strides were made toward the promise of unalienable rights. But even today, because of humanity’s tendency toward sin and evil, people struggle greatly to treat others in a godly way. Today we will examine humanity’s failure to provide justice, Jesus as the perfect judge, and God’s desire for His people to act justly.

Q: What kind of injustice have you seen throughout your life? What caused it?

Q: What are some moments when you feel as though you have been unjustly treated? What caused that?

RECAP: Now that we have finished going through the life of David, we will take the last four weeks of our study to look at the four leadership offices in Samuel – judge, king, priest and prophet – and see how only Christ can ever really fulfill those roles.

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1 Samuel 3:19–21; 7:15–17; and 8:1–9 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Human leaders are only representatives of God as king.

Q: What did Samuel do as a prophet? As a judge?

Q: How did Samuel's sons behave as judges?

We see four leadership roles in the book of Samuel – judge, king, prophet and priest. Moving from a theocracy to a monarchy was a major transition for the nation of Israel. The main human leadership role changed from judge to king.

Theocracy: During the Exodus, Wanderings and Conquest

When Israel left Egypt, Moses was their leader and Scripture calls him a “prophet.” Because it was a theocracy, there was no human king; God Himself was their king. Their human leader was simply a spokesperson for God to His people, which is what the Hebrew word *prophet* means, “spokesperson.” Moses’ role was to hear from God and then communicate to the people what God said. He was not to make decisions; he was just a human representative of God. God said that Moses’ role as prophet was unique, like no one before him. He spoke directly to Moses, not through dreams or visions, but “mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles” (Numbers 12:6–8).

During this time, God also established the role of priest and ordained Moses’ brother, Aaron, as the first high priest. The priest’s role was to mediate the sacrifices between the Lord and His people (Leviticus 1:3–17), to make atonement for the people and the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:20–34), to distinguish between clean and unclean (Leviticus 10:10), and to teach the law to the people (Leviticus 10:11). The priest could also inquire of the Lord on behalf of the people using the Urim/Thummim (Numbers 27:21).

During this time, the leadership team consisted of God as king, Moses as prophet, and Aaron as priest. Moses also fulfilled the role of “judge” between the people, along with a group of elders, but he wasn’t called “judge” as a title or role; he called the elders “judges” (Exodus 18; Numbers 25:5).

Theocracy in Judges: Leaders Who Were Not also Prophets

But when the people finally settled in the land, things changed. They were supposed to continue as a theocracy, with God as king, but the people kept turning away from the Lord and doing “what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). When they rebelled

against God, He would get angry and let the nations around them overtake them. Then they would cry out to God to save them. The Lord would raise up a “judge” to save them from their enemies. They would follow the Lord as long as that judge lived, but when the judge died, they would worship other gods again, and the cycle started all over (Judges 2:10-19). This went on for more than 400 years.

Unlike Moses, these judges were not prophets. Until Samuel, only one of the judges, Deborah, was also called a prophet (Judges 4:4). The Hebrew word means “to judge between or rule over people.” Moses used the term “judge” for the 70 elders he chose to help him judge disputes (Exodus 18:21–23). During the book of Judges, the judges God raised up acted as military leaders who delivered the people from their enemies, as Moses had done. So they fulfilled some of Moses’ leadership roles (deliverer, judge/ruler). And they did hear from God in some ways, yet they were not considered prophets (except Deborah and Samuel), so God used the term “judge” for them as leaders.

Samuel was the last judge of Israel before the monarchy (1 Samuel 7:15–17; 8:1–9). But he was also a priest (1 Samuel 2:11–3:1; 7:10; 10:8) and a prophet (1 Samuel 3:19-21)! During Samuel’s time as leader, God was king, and Samuel filled *all three* of the other roles.¹ It seemed he could be the one to change Israel for good! But then ...

Monarchy: From Judge to King

When he became too old, Samuel appointed his sons as judges, but they did not follow God. They perverted justice for their own gain (8:1–3), so the elders of Israel came to Samuel and asked for a king. In their view, this “judge thing” wasn’t working. They needed “more” than a human representative of God. Samuel was upset, but God told him the people weren’t rejecting him; they were rejecting God as their king (8:7). From this point on, kings were the central leaders in Israel, not judges. The king, with a group of elders, fulfilled the role of judging disputes (8:5) as Moses had, at the city gate (Deuteronomy 21:18–21; Ruth 4:1–11; 2 Samuel 19:8).

In his time as a leader, Samuel functioned as judge, priest and prophet, with God as king. But when the monarchy began, these roles split. The king judged disputes with the help of elders and led the military with the help of generals. But the king was not a prophet; he needed a prophet separate from himself to remind him of God’s Word and hold him accountable when he was going astray. He was not a priest; he had a separate priest to facilitate worship and sacrifices in the temple. The people were kicking God out of the role of king, yet in God’s kingdom, any human king was still supposed to rule as His representative, not rule in his own ways. Like Moses and Joshua, the king was to meditate on God’s law and follow it, ruling as God’s representative, as vice-regent of the true king (Deuteronomy 17:18–20).

Q: Consider whatever leadership roles you have – as a parent, at work, in the church, or the community. What difference would it make if you thought of yourself as God’s representative in those leadership roles?

Deuteronomy 10:12–21; 16:18–20; and Micah 6:8 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Godly people execute justice because they have the heart of God.

Q: How does accepting bribes affect the judgment of judges?

Q: Why is justice so important for the people of God?

When Samuel appointed his sons as judges, they didn’t follow God’s law and do what was just; they took bribes for their own gain, which was explicitly forbidden in God’s law (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19). God’s judges were supposed to judge between people the way He would, executing justice with no partiality and no bribes (Deuteronomy 10:17–18). When the elders saw that Samuel’s sons were perverting justice, they asked him for a king to judge between them instead. But throughout the monarchy, many kings did the same thing.

During the time of the kings, God continued to send prophets to tell the kings how they were committing injustice against the people (Isaiah 58:3–7; Ezekiel 22:29; Hosea 10:13; et. al). The prophets preached a lot of messages, but they can all be boiled down to two issues – idolatry and injustice, which are just two sides of the same coin. They were breaking the two greatest commandments, to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and love others as yourself. Idolatry is “not loving God,” and injustice is “not loving others.”

In the Bible, “justice” means to give others what they are due, in both the negative and the positive sense. Punishment for a crime gives the criminal what is due and brings justice to the victim. But justice isn’t only about what happens in court. It’s about giving people what they are due in all things. Doing justice in business is charging a fair price and paying a fair wage, not exploiting people. Doing justice socially is giving people their unalienable human rights – everyone, not just certain groups of people. The cry for justice in Scripture is focused on helping the vulnerable and the oppressed, those who are denied those unalienable rights. Our God desires justice for all, but He fights for justice for those who have been treated unjustly.

Justice isn’t just a good thing; it is the very heart of God’s law, because love is the very essence of who God is (1 John 4:8). If we really loved God and loved others as ourselves, we would not let other people be treated unjustly. If we really had the heart of God, we would seek justice the way He does. Justice is a foundational part of what it means to be God’s people, to love God and love others.

Q: In what ways have you seen people treated unjustly?

Q: How is God calling you to “do justice” in the world around you?

1 Kings 3:5–14; 10:6–9; Psalm 99; Isaiah 11:1–5; Ezekiel 34:1–6, and 17–24 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The failure of Israel’s judges points us to Christ.

Q: How did the leaders of Israel treat God’s people? What would God do about it?

Q: What will make the “branch” of Jesse a just judge?

When Solomon became king, he realized it would take a special wisdom from God to judge the people well (1 Kings 3:5–14). Moses, Samuel and David had all judged well because they had the Spirit of the Lord with them (Psalm 99; 119:121). As prophets, Moses and Samuel heard directly from God about what to do. David had prophets as advisors and inquired of the Lord every step of the way.

When Samuel’s sons didn’t judge well, the elders asked for a king. David and Solomon were good judges (1 Kings 10:6–9), but through the remainder of the monarchy, most of the kings judged the same way Samuel’s sons had, perverting justice, and abusing the people for their own gain (Ezekiel 34:1–6). Putting a king over them instead of a judge didn’t solve the problem of those in power perverting justice for their own gain. The problem wasn’t the role; if anything, a king would have *more* power to abuse than a judge. The issue was the heart of the leader. Those who loved and followed God judged fairly; those who didn’t used the people for their own gain. But even Samuel, David and Solomon made many mistakes and missteps in judgment.

The failure of Samuel’s sons and so many kings after them to be righteous judges over God’s people only points to our need for the Messiah who would come to judge the people in righteousness and justice. This Messiah would have the Spirit of the Lord upon Him as Moses and David had, and the Spirit of wisdom and understanding as Solomon had. He would judge with righteousness and equity, executing justice for the poor and the meek as the Lord Himself does. This judge to come would be filled with God’s Spirit in a way no one ever had been before (Isaiah 11:1–5). God will remove the human leaders from over His people and come Himself to judge His people (Ezekiel 34:17–23). Messiah would be a perfect judge because He would be God Himself.

Jesus is the One appointed by the Father to judge the living and the dead (John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31). We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). When Jesus returns on the Day of the Lord, He will judge all the world, with both the “positive” and “negative” sides – punishment for the wicked and vindication for the righteous (Zephaniah 1:14–18; 3:8–13; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11). Those of us who know Jesus have no need to fear His judgment; we will be saved (Romans 8:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12). We can trust Christ’s judgment; it is always just (John 5:30; 8:15–16). Judges, Samuel and Kings show us that only Jesus is the true judge. Only He has the right and wisdom to judge someone’s eternity.

The goal of His judgment isn't to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:16–21). Christ commands us not to self-righteously condemn others, but to help them “remove the log out of their eyes,” which does take discernment, wisdom and judgment, not the kind that condemns but the kind that helps (Matthew 7:1–5). We are not to judge those outside the Church, but we should judge believers, including ourselves – not to condemn but for accountability, to help turn people back to the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:1–13) and even rebuke and correct to help one another grow in sanctification (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Our role as God's people isn't to condemn the world, but to do justice (Micah 6:8).

Q: How can we find more wisdom and discernment to know how to make good judgments between different sides of a situation?

Q: How would it help our spiritual growth to look to Jesus to be our Judge, to ask Him to judge our hearts and our actions (Psalm 139:23–24)?

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When a whole community cares about justice, great change can be found in the hearts and minds of those around. While it doesn't always happen, the small acts of kindness from ordinary people can make all the difference in changing someone's entire life. But in order to be this kind of person, we must delve deeply into the heart and mind of Jesus first. When we rely on our own understanding of things, we can find that fickle and ungodly thoughts can take precedence over our actions. Being with and around other believers helps us to iron out these tendencies within us. When we all pursue God wholeheartedly, amazing things happen because God is on the move. Let us be obedient to Him today.

CHALLENGES

THINK: What is the difference between "judging" someone to hold them accountable and lead them back to the Lord and condemning them with our judgment? In what ways are you tempted to judge and condemn others? How can Jesus' commands to look at our own lives first help us to be less condemning and show more grace, yet still help our brother take the speck out of his eye?

PRAY for God to give you His heart for justice. Ask Him to open your eyes to injustice around you so you can see the ways people are being treated unjustly in the world, in your community, maybe even in your own family or church. Ask Him to give you the strength and wisdom to fight it and defend those who are being treated unjustly.

ACT: Get involved with Prestonwood Pregnancy Center and become a voice for the unborn. Learn more about how you can serve, pray, and/or donate at <https://prestonwoodpregnancy.org/about-us/volunteer/>.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we will look at another leadership office – prophet – and how Jesus was the ultimate prophet who God promised would come.

¹ Edward A. Engelbrecht, ed., *Lutheran Bible Companion, Volume 1: Introduction and Old Testament* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2020).