

# Sermon Series: Unshakeable

Building our lives on the promises of God

## #10 Justice will have its day – Revelation 10:11-12; Acts 17:31

Reach back into your childhood memory, if you can (that's more difficult for some of us than others!). Think about when you first learned to say the words: "it's not fair".

What action or word prompted you to use those words? A **sibling** broke your favourite toy and never got punished? You lost a loved one to the **reckless act** of a stranger? A lover **betrayed your trust** and went on to live a happy life?

Have you ever prayed the prayer of the Psalmist:

"O Lord, how long will you look on?" (Ps 35:17 GOD'S WORD)

When did you first ask the Prophet's question:

"Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jer. 12:1 NIV)

Why indeed?! Why do drug lords get rich? Why do sex offenders go free? Why do hypocrites get to lead nations? Why do murderers get parole? How come cheaters win? Why don't oppressors get what they deserve?

Cries for justice now, **not later**, fill our news feeds every day.

**REFLECT** - Have a brief chat to the person next to you – what news items about the lack of justice have you noticed recently? Or what has caused you recently to cry out, "it's not fair"?

In 1963 Bob Dylan released the song "Masters of War". So relevant are his words that it's as if Dylan wrote them last week lyric. Speaking on behalf of many his lyrics declare about architects of injustice and bloodshed:

But there's one thing I know/Though I'm younger than you/That even Jesus would never/Forgive what you do... And I hope that you die/And your death will come soon/I'll follow your casket/By the pale afternoon/And I'll watch while you're lowered/Down to your deathbed/And I'll stand over your grave/'Til I'm sure that you're dead

The Bible empathises with human anger and frustration about injustice, but the God of the Bible **desires that none should die**, but that all should turn to

God who is patient, forgiving and peace-loving. That's a problem for those who cry, "How long, Lord..."

### 1. **The promise of a Day to come** (Acts 17:31a)

To that question, the Bible offers a clear answer. It comes as a **promise** proclaimed in Acts 17:31 by the Apostle Paul:

"For [God] has set a day when the world will be judged." (Acts 17:31)

The Apostle Paul addressed philosophers and thinkers of the day in Athens:

"While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent, because [God] has **fixed a day** on which the world will be judged in righteousness by one whom [God] has appointed, and of this all people have been given assurance by [God] raising Jesus from the dead.' (Acts 17:30-31)

In the original Greek, Paul says God has "**singled out**" a judgment day – it will surely come. Justice will have its day!

If I'm honest, **the idea** of a **Judgment Day** is highly unpopular, even embarrassing – that is, **unless you are the victim** of flagrant selfishness or harmfulness under a flawed and compromised system of justice!

Many of us remember preachers **pounding the pulpit** and using judgment day as a **tool of terror** to make people behave and not sin. But in the New Testament, the promise of judgment day comforts the victimized, the poor, the persecuted, and the wrongfully accused alike.

It says to them, God is not sitting idly by "twiddling thumbs" while the wicked prosper and the poor are trampled. God's patience and forbearance makes room for all to receive God's grace<sup>1</sup> proclaimed in the Gospel for a time, but there **will be a final day** when the wicked will get their **comeuppance**, and justice will flow like a river in the promised new creation.

### 2. **Jesus is the right judge for the world** (Acts 17:31b)

Paul says that we can be assured that this Day, prophesied long ago, is coming, because of the resurrection of Jesus. NT Wright explains the connection like this, saying:

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<sup>1</sup> In Romans 2:4 Paul urges the heeding of the Good news that God is patient and forbearing enough to give time to turn away from selfishness and harm, and turn toward God's goodness and truth.

“...the resurrection constitutes Jesus as the world’s true judge in a rich and deep sense: not so much that it qualifies Him to sit on the bench in a wig and pronounce from a position of lofty moral superiority, but that He, as the first part of creation to be set right after the corruption of evil and death had done its worst to Him, is now not only the one who can reflect God’s healing justice perfectly... but the one who actually embodies it in Himself.”

In other words, unlike the potluck you experience when you seek good decisions from an earthly courtroom, God has appointed “**right**” and truthful judge - one who is not crooked, one who knows the injustice of men first hand, one who is **truly fair**. Theologically speaking, the risen **Christ is our Judge**. It’s a statement of faith that is a **comfort** to victims of evil-doing, and an **affirmation** to who tirelessly campaign for the downtrodden.

That Jesus is our judge is even more important given the bible says we all deserve judgment! Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, saying...

“...**we must all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Paul included himself, you, me, and all people in the Day of Judgment promised by God! Many of us want justice, but not judgment. But **is there really one without the other?** Thank God Jesus is the one making each verdict.

Paul uses the ancient Greek word **bema**. It’s a term for a court in session – the public place where ancient Roman judges sat to give verdicts.<sup>1</sup> The photo on screen is of the *bema* in the public square in the Biblical city of Corinth.

### 3. **Christ’ Judgment will be comprehensive** (Revelation 20:11-12)

In the reading we heard from the Book of Revelation, the author John uses apocalyptic language – the judgment seat of Christ is “the great white throne.”

“Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it... I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also, another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books.”  
(Revelation 20:11-12)

Some scholars teach that there are **three separate events** to come on the Day of Judgement.<sup>ii</sup> Others teach that these three are just **different aspects** of the one final Judgment – i) the nations first, ii) the believers second, and iii) the stubborn hearted who oppose God as the third.

Whichever way you interpret the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation it pictures Jesus on the throne forever **balancing the scales of fairness**. The new age to come is one of **truly just living** – a promise to hold on to.

**Three further promises** flow from hope of Judgment Day in the Scriptures:

1. God will **publicly pardon** followers of Jesus – Paul says this will be “the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16). The result will be a new world draped in justice. No person will look on the other with suspicion because all will be known; all will have been forgiven; all will have been transformed to be fit for peace.
2. Secondly, God will **applaud those who have served** like Christ – Paul speaks of the “rewards in heaven” Jesus referred to in the Sermon on the Mount for the humble of heart. He writes in 1 Cor. 4:5: “God will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.” In Hebrews 6:10 we read: “God is not unjust and will not forget your work and the love you have helped God’s people and continue to help them.”
3. Thirdly, God Will **honour the wishes of the stubborn of heart** – Sadly, many, like the imperial persecutors of Christians in Paul’s day, love their **independence from God**, and think themselves **superior to God**. God will, in the end, after much time and grace, grant them what their deluded hearts desire.

This final promise of God in our series is both comforting and sobering. The next time you cry out, “It’s not fair!”, remember the hope of Amos 5:24 which cries: “...let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” The next time you turn to God in prayer, give thanks that Jesus is the Judge the world needs, and He is the judge you and I need – for God will pardon us our wrongdoing if we are one with Him, though we ourselves deserve a different destiny if we are truly honest.

God’s promise is an affirmation to the humble, a warning to the stubborn and superior, and a comfort to victims - “... [God] has set a day when the world will be judged.” (Acts 17:31)

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<sup>i</sup> E.g. Matthew 27:19 with Pilate

<sup>ii</sup> Christian scholars sometimes differ on the detail of how the judgment will take place, but agree to 3 aspects of judgment as being for:

1. for the nations (Matt. 25:31-4)
2. for believers (2 Cor. 5:10); and
3. for those who stubbornly reject the love of God or keep oppressing the people of God (Rev. 20:11-15).