

# Sovereignty of the Lord Over Human Justice

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[ 0 : 00 ] We are in Proverbs chapter 21. We ended at verse 2 last week. We're going to start there and go all the way to verse 31.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Father, we confess that your wisdom often confounds our human wisdom.

Your grace, your lavish mercy confounds our sense of what should be. Because your ways are not our ways.

As far as the heavens are higher than the earth, your ways are higher than our ways. And so, Lord, we do not approach your Word arrogantly, seeking to conform it to our own liking.

But, Lord, we approach it humbly, wanting to submit ourselves to your will, to your kingship. So please address us now in the reading and preaching of your Word.

[ 1 : 36 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Proverbs 21, verses 2 to 31.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked are sin. The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death. The violence of the wicked will sweep them away because they refuse to do what is just.

The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is upright. It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

[ 2 : 48 ] The soul of the wicked desires evil. His neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes. When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise.

When a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge. The righteous one observes the house of the wicked. He throws the wicked down to ruin.

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. A gift in secret averts anger and a concealed bribe strong wrath.

When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but terror to evildoers. One who wanders from the way of good sense will rest in the assembly of the dead. Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man.

He who loves wine and oil will not be rich. The wicked is a ransom for the righteous and the traitor for the upright. It is better to live in a desert land than with the quarrelsome and fretful woman.

[ 3 : 53 ] Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.

A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble. Scoffer is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he brings it with evil intent? A false witness will perish, but the word of a man who hears will endure.

A wicked man puts on a bold face, but the upright gives thought to his ways. No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

[ 5 : 01 ] The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord. God's holy and authoritative word. Justice is a buzzword nowadays.

Using Google Books and Graham Viewer, you can search for words or phrases from over 25 million of their digitized books to analyze trends. And if you search for the phrase social justice, you see

steady growth in the use of the phrase starting in the 20th century, with sharp exponential growth happening starting in around 2000, 2004.

And using LexisNexis, that's the name of a company, their database, which has over 82 billion legal and public records related documents, you can do a similar search of popular publications like the New York Times, which yields very similar results.

Between 2000 and 2020, the number of articles mentioning the phrase social justice spiked from about 170 a year to 800 per year.

And you see the same exponential growth with other often associated phrases such as white privilege, male privilege, etc. Some pundits call this the great awakening.

[ 6 : 24 ] Now, justice is undoubtedly a hot issue, but what exactly is justice? Everybody seems to agree that justice is a good thing, but people disagree vehemently about what it should look like and how it should be attained.

How should a Christian think about justice? What does it look like for the Christian as we are commanded to do in Micah 6, verse 8, to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God?

Our passage for today answers some of those questions for us. And its main point is this, that we should do righteousness and justice trusting that God will fight on our behalf.

First, we see the sacrifice of the righteous in verses 2 to 8, the ransom for the righteous in verses 9 to 18, and finally the reward of the righteous in verses 19 to 31.

This passage begins with a twofold mention of the Lord in verses 2 to 3 and verses 30 to 31. The book ends the passage showing God's sovereignty over this entire thing of justice, of human society, over it.

[ 7 : 47 ] And it says in verses 2 to 3, every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Immediately, this sets off a sharp distinction between the biblical understanding of justice and our cultural understanding of justice. Righteousness and justice are not standards that are determined by man.

It's determined by God. Why? Because every way of a man is right in his own eyes. In our community group this past Friday, we talked about how this proverb reminded us of the refrain in the book of Judges, that in those days, there was no king in Israel.

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. This is the consequence whenever a sinful human being refuses to submit to Christ the King.

Every man for himself. A sinful human being is incapable of correctly defining righteousness and justice because he is too prideful.

[ 8 : 59 ] He is too self-righteous. He is too biased toward himself. Only the Lord who weighs the heart can be the true judge. Only he can be the arbiter of justice.

This reality runs contrary to popular opinion because we live in a functionally atheistic society that tries to untether its ethical system from God's law.

Once you lose that vertical accountability to God, what God says is right and just, once you're untethered from that, then all you have left is horizontal accountability.

You should do no harm to other people. So then, to give you an example, the entire realm of sexual ethics, for example, gets reduced to consent.

In this context, there is no higher law by which people can say fornication or homosexual relations or adultery or pornography is immoral.

[ 10 : 01 ] There's no basis for that. No one can say that that is sin because God has been removed from the picture. All they can ask is, was it consensual?

Did your boyfriend or girlfriend consent to it? Well then, it's fine even if you're not married. Did the other man or woman consent to the same-sex relationship?

Well then, it's fine because you get to choose whomever you want to love. Did your husband or wife consent to it? Well then, it's not adultery.

That's an open marriage. Was the pornography marriage, the pornography video rather, legally produced and distributed with the consent of all the individuals involved in it?

Well then, there's nothing wrong with it. It's just business. This is a woefully inadequate and unreliable standard of ethics.

[ 10 : 58 ] It is the Lord, not man, that sets the standard for righteousness and justice. Verse 3 says, To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

The words righteousness and justice are often paired together and have some overlap in meaning. But with the risk of oversimplification, one can say that righteousness refers to right living and justice refers to fair judgment.

Deuteronomy 6, verse 25 says, And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God as He has commanded us. So righteousness entails living in accordance with God's commands.

Deuteronomy 16, verses 19-20 defines the word justice this way. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality.

And you shall not accept a bribe, for bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, only justice, you shall follow.

[ 12 : 08 ] So justice entails judging everyone, whether they're rich or poor, man or a woman, strong or weak, white or black, on their own merits rather than showing partiality.

It means to give people what is their rightful due. That's why in Genesis 18-25, Abraham reasons with God this way, Far be from you to do such a thing to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked.

Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? To do what is just is to give people what is their due. To punish the righteous along with the wicked would be an injustice because it's not judging people fairly based on their merits.

We'll unpack these two terms further in the following verses, but these are good working definitions for now to understand what this means. In verse 3, to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

This comparative construction takes something that is otherwise considered good, in this case sacrifice, and compares it to something that is even better, righteousness and justice, in order to emphasize just how important that really is.

[ 13 : 33 ] Sacrifice is not unimportant. It is commanded by God, as we see clearly in Leviticus chapters 1-7. But to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than even sacrifice.

And this truth, this is not an isolated incident, this truth echoes again and again throughout many pages of Scripture. God does not care for empty rituals devoid of sincere devotion.

God does not care for worship without obedience. That you are joining us this Sunday, whether here in person or virtually, is a good thing.

It is commendable. God commands it. And it's indispensable for your perseverance and faith. But is the rest of your life, Monday through Saturday, consistent with the faith that you profess?

Does your day-to-day life bear out the truth that you sing on Sunday morning during the worship service? If people were to observe your life, would they conclude that you love God with your whole heart?

[ 14 : 50 ] Would they even know that you are a Christian? Verse 27 escalates this further. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he brings it with evil intent?

Why do you, it's helpful to ask, why do the wicked even bother to bring a sacrifice to God? They do it to preserve a sense, a semblance of piety and respectability.

They do it to maintain their own credibility in order to advance further their evil agenda. But the Lord abominates such sacrifice.

He rejects hypocritical worship. God cannot be any more emphatic than Amos chapter 5 verses 21 to 24. I hate, I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. And the peace offerings of your fat animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs to the melody of your harps, I will not listen.

[ 16 : 00 ] But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Are you living rightly in your relationship with God and man?

Are you judging fairly and giving people what is their rightful due? According to Jesus, even in the New Testament, Mark chapter 12 verse 33, to love God with all of your heart, with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

You may have a faith, sure, but is there love and good works to accompany it? Do you love your neighbors enough to serve them, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them?

Is your work characterized by integrity? Is your spending characterized by generosity? Are your relationships characterized by selflessness?

God cares intensely about how you live. God is jealous that you love Him with your whole heart. God insists on your total allegiance.

[17:22] The sacrifice of the righteous is not merely a cultic thing. It entails an ethic. That's why Romans 12 verse 1 says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Then, Solomon gives some specific examples of this in verses 4 to 8. Verse 4 says, Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.

Like verse 2, this verse also mentions the eyes and the heart. And earlier, in Proverbs 20, verse 17, it mentioned the spirit of man as the lamp of the Lord.

That God, to God, even the inner, the hidden inner person, the spirit of man is illuminated. He uses it to search our innermost parts. So this verse is continuing that imagery.

It's saying that the God who exposes the spirit of the wicked, the God who weighs the proud heart, the God who sees the haughty eyes, denounces them altogether as sin. Something that misses the mark, the standard that He has set for us to meet.

[18:33] Those with haughty eyes and a proud heart forsake righteousness and justice. This is evident in their greed. Look at verses 5 to 6 with me. The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death. Here we see that the righteous are diligent and that the wicked are hasty in their attempt to gain wealth, which reveals their greed.

They are willing to take shortcuts. They are willing to cheat others. They are because they believe that the end justifies the means. So they get treasures by a lying tongue, but this is ultimately, this passage teaches us, futile because of God's justice.

Whoever is quick to breathe out lies in order to gain an advantage over others will learn that their wealth is but a breath, a fleeting vapor that vanishes in a moment. He comes only to poverty and gets caught in a snare of death in contrast to the righteous who, through patient diligence, not hasty schemes, arrives at wealth.

Verses 7 to 8 continue this theme of divine retribution. The violence of the wicked will sweep them away because they refuse to do what is just. The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is upright.

[19:57] Though the wicked do violence to others, in order to get their way, in God's poetic justice, they will be undone by their own violence. As all of you know, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Though the guilty try to take shortcuts, their way is crooked, so they end up going the long way around and in fact never arrive at their destination.

In contrast, the conduct of the pure is upright. It's literally straight. They are the ones who will prosper in the end. And then in verses 9 to 18, Solomon talks about the ruin of the wicked and how they will become the ransom for the righteous.

But between these sections, we find an unexpected verse. Verse 9 says, It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

This same surprising thing happens between the next two sections of this passage as well. It says in verse 19, It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.

[21:08] And these verses, if you're like me and you're just reading through it, come out of the blue, don't they? Like, what in the world is going on? What does this have to do with righteousness and justice?

That's the theme of this passage. One of the most prominent metaphors in this book, in the book of Proverbs, is that of the woman or the wife as a personification of either wisdom or folly.

So, for example, in Proverbs 8.35, Lady Wisdom says, Whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. And this was paralleled as we saw in chapter 18, verse 22.

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord. So often, literary units within Proverbs begin with an exhortation to listen to or find wisdom.

And sometimes, that's substituted by Proverbs about the wife as the organizing principle. Solomon's doing the same thing here. The comparison format of verses 9 and 19 bring to mind the comparison of verse 3, which began the first section of this chapter.

[ 22 : 17 ] To do righteousness and justice is better, is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. It is better to live in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman. Even though Proverbs speaks repeatedly of the fact that it is a good thing to find a wife, a wise wife, just that it's a good thing to find wisdom and that both things are a gift from the Lord.

Having no wife is better than having a quarrelsome and foolish one. Living in a corner of the housetop like living in the desert land is a lonesome and tiresome experience.

It means being exposed to the harsh elements, to the beating rain, to the scorching sun, and yet, the Proverbs tell us, such a life is better than sharing a house with a quarrelsome wife.

This makes the obvious point that a wife should strive to cultivate the gentle and quiet spirit that 1 Peter 3, verse 4 tells us is very precious in God's sight, but it makes another less obvious point.

[ 23 : 28 ] Having the semblance of respectability by having a wife to share a home with, having the appearance of wisdom, being a scoffer who acts like he already has all the wisdom he needs is worse than being unmarried and unsheltered, is worse than being known as a simpleton who lacks wisdom.

It is better not to offer sacrifices at all than to offer disingenuous sacrifices. It is better not to worship than to worship hypocritically without doing righteousness and justice.

Verses 10 to 12 continue, The soul of the wicked desires evil. His neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes. When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise.

When a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge. The righteous one observes the house of the wicked. He throws the wicked down to ruin. Verses 10 and 12 repeat the words wicked and evil to bracket these verses.

And the word ruin in verse 12 is the same Hebrew word that is translated evil in verse 10. And this repetition highlights once again God's poetic justice. The soul of the wicked desires evil to bring evil upon others.

[ 24 : 42 ] But God overthrows the wicked down to evil. In other words, they get what was coming to them. And since righteousness includes obeying and imitating the righteous one, it requires mercy toward our neighbors.

But the wicked person finds no mercy in his eyes for his neighbor. And once again, here we see three types of people that appear again and again throughout the book of Proverbs.

The scoffer, the simple, and the wise. As we saw in 1925, the scoffer is the close-minded person, the proud. The simple is empty-minded, and the wise person is open-minded.

The scoffer, as verse 24 says, is a haughty man who acts with arrogant pride. He is brazen. He's fixed in his sinful, erroneous ways. And for this reason, the scoffer never learns, even when he is punished.

But if justice is executed, it's upheld, and the wicked are punished. The simple who sees that and learn, sees the wicked punished, sees the scoffer punished, will learn and become wise.

[ 25 : 52 ] In contrast, both the scoffer and the simple, a wise man only needs a word of instruction, and he gets wiser still. That's the hallmark of wisdom, humility, the receptiveness toward the word of God.

The wisest among men is the most teachable before God, while the foolish scoffer is incorrigible. And it's better to be a simpleton whose ignorance is exposed than a scoffer whose folly is hidden, just as it is better to live in the corner of the housetop than in a house shared with the quarrelsome way.

Then in verses 13-15, Solomon gives us more details about the demands of justice. Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

A gift in secret averts anger and a concealed bribe strong wrath. When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers. In order to do justice, and this is expanding our working definition of justice, we must not close our ears to the cry of the poor.

Why? Because as we saw earlier in chapter 17, verse 5, whoever mocks the poor insults his maker. Because every human being, no matter how downtrodden and poor they are, is created in the image of Almighty God.

[ 27 : 21 ] There is a basic decency, basic respect that is owed to them, that is due to them, and that is not merely a matter of charity, it is a matter of justice.

And for that reason, even though bribes are often effective in this sinful world, we must never receive or take bribes, because doing so subverts justice for the poor who cannot afford to pay a bribe.

And when justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but terror to evildoers, because the righteous know and can live confidently that their integrity will be vindicated in the end, while the evildoers will learn that they will be punished for their wickedness.

Deuteronomy chapter 10, 17 to 19 says this, The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who is not partial and takes no bribe.

He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. This is a wonderful passage because it juxtaposes how high and mighty God is, God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, awesome God, and it juxtaposes that with people who are most powerless in society, the fatherless, the widow, the sojourner, the immigrant, the most vulnerable members of society, whose rights were often disregarded by people, by people who were more empowered and better resourced.

[ 29 : 06 ] Giving them what is their due, these poor people, as God defines it, giving them legal protection, giving them basic provision, this is not a matter of charity, it's a matter of justice, giving them what is their due.

This shows us how nuanced God's wisdom is, how nuanced the biblical picture of justice is. You can't fit it neatly into our conservative or liberal political categories.

On the one hand, conservative economic theorists generally emphasize individual responsibility and believe that the root causes of poverty are broken families, character defects, like lack of self-control and laziness, and bad habits and lifestyles.

They would applaud verses like verse 5, The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty. It's the lack of diligence and falling for get-rich-quick schemes that brings poverty.

Or verse 17, Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will not be rich. It's the love of pleasure, a taste for luxury that leads to poverty.

[ 30 : 28 ] Or verse 20, Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it. It's undisciplined spending, devouring one's goods too quickly that leads to poverty.

Or verse 25, The desire of the slugger kills him, for his hand refuses to labor. It's sluggishness, indolence, the unwillingness to work that leads to poverty.

And they would be right. And it's for this reason they argue that there being prosperity for some and poverty for some they argue is just.

Because people are different. Their work ethic is different. Their intelligence is different. Their character is different. So then engineering equal outcomes for different people is to treat them unequally, which is inverted injustice, they argue.

On the other hand, liberal economic theorists generally emphasize societal responsibility and believe that root causes of poverty are systemic injustices beyond people's control, such as racial prejudice, joblessness, educational deprivation, mass incarceration, redlining, etc.

[ 31 : 46 ] They would applaud verses like Proverbs 13, 23. The fellow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice. It's the injustice of the wicked that wipes out the gains of the hardworking poor.

Or chapter 21, verse 14, in our passage, a gift in secret averts anger and a concealed bribe stirs wrath. The judicial system and the economic system are both weighted toward the powerful and the wealthy, keeping others trapped in poverty.

And they, too, would be right. And for this reason, they argue that income inequality is fundamentally unjust. But they both miss a part of the picture because Scripture highlights both individual responsibility and societal responsibility.

Both individual sins and systemic injustices. The Christian who seeks to do righteousness and justice must recognize both.

And Proverbs carefully makes this distinction consistently. As I've said several times throughout this series, while the word poverty is used consistently in a negative way in Proverbs, the word poor is used consistently in a positive way.

[ 33 : 17 ] Poverty in wisdom literature is a result of divine judgment for sins such as laziness, stinginess, love of luxury, carelessness. But the poor are so because of circumstances that are outside of their control, such as societal injustice.

and therefore they receive God's special compassion and care. Chapter 21, verse 17 is not an exception to this rule. Even though the ESV obfuscates this by translating it poor man, that expression is literally in the Hebrew man of poverty.

Whoever loves pleasure will be a man of poverty. Yes, the wicked should come to poverty. That is just. But we cannot assume, therefore, that all poor are wicked.

Instead, our disposition must be one of mercy because we serve a God who has been merciful to us even though we were all spiritually impoverished.

God is described as the defender of the poor, orphans, widows, and immigrants. God will not listen to the cries of those who refuse to listen to the cry of the poor. The one who wanders from the way of good sense, though it might seem like they're doing just fine for a while, will ultimately rest in the assembly of the dead, as verse 16 says.

[ 34 : 45 ] Because as verse 18 says, the wicked is a ransom for the righteous and the traitor for the upright. The wicked seek to sacrifice the righteous for their own enrichment.

They seek to use the righteous as stepping stones to climb the ladder of society. But in the end, they will be reduced to a ransom for the righteous, paying the price for the freedom, the vindication, and prosperity of the righteous.

Having spoken of the ruin of the wicked, how they become the ransom for the righteous, Solomon finally speaks of the reward of the righteous in verses 19 to 29, which is again introduced by a better than proverb about the quarrelsome wife.

And then it says in verse 21, whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor. Once again, the theme of righteousness and justice predominate this passage.

And here, righteousness is paired with kindness. This is a wonderful verse with a pun on the word righteousness, which depending on the context can also mean vindication or salvation.

[ 35 : 52 ] So it says, whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness or salvation, vindication, and honor. It's teaching us this, don't be fixated on the pursuit of honor, on the pursuit of health, on the pursuit of wealth, on the pursuit of the worldly good life.

Aim higher than that. Pursue instead righteousness and kindness. Pursue instead justice. And then to your surprise and delight, you will find life, salvation, and honor.

Look at verses 25 to 26. The desire of the slugger kills him. The desire of the slugger kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

The wicked are defined by their cravings. The righteous are defined by their giving. This is so counterintuitive, but it is wonderfully true. If you are driven by your cravings, if you are concerned primarily with pursuing wealth and pleasure, then you will hoard.

But if you are primarily concerned with doing righteousness and justice, then you will give and not hold back. look and you will learn that you cannot outgive God.

[ 37 : 22 ] And you will find life, salvation, and honor. As Proverbs 11, 24 said, one gives freely, yet grows all the richer. Another withholds what he should give and only suffers want.

Generosity, not stinginess, is the principle of prosperity. prosperity. This paradox is seen in verses 22 to 23 as well. A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble. This is not another way of saying simply that brain is better than brawn.

It's not talking about human intelligence or worldly wisdom. It's saying something much deeper than that, and it's a shocking image. A single wise man, a solitary wise man, scales the city of the mighty.

And after having climbed up, he single-handedly brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

The stronghold of the world's mighty, fortified with their ungodly riches, connections, and power, is no match against a single wise man who is backed by the wisdom of the almighty God.

[ 38 : 44 ] It is better to be alone on God's side than to be with the millions arrayed against God. And verse 23 is linked to verse 22 by the military metaphor.

The word keep is the same word that refers to guarding or defending a fortress. And so this verse teaches that the security of the wise comes from guarding, defending his mouth by being judicious in his speech and refusing to speak evil unlike the blabbering fool who gets himself into trouble.

And this military metaphor is continued and brought to a climax in verses 30 to 31 at the end of this chapter. No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord. verses 30 to 31 form a powerful poetic pair in Hebrew. The words wisdom, understanding, counsel, battle, victory, they all end with the same vowel sound.

And word no is repeated three times at the beginning of each phrase in the verse 30. And these poetic devices, this alliteration, anaphorah, they build toward this halting, this interrupting, climactic declaration that nothing can avail against the Lord, which is the last word of verse 30.

[ 40 : 10 ] Words wisdom and counsel are often used in the context of waging warfare. Proverbs 20, 18 says plans are established by counsel. By wise guidance wage war.

Proverbs 24, 6 says for by wise guidance you can wage your war. In abundance of counselors there is victory. But this proverb assures us that no amount of counselors and worldly wisdom can prevail against the Lord.

There is an insurmountable gap between the Lord and man. Like a biker that comes to a splattering halt as he sprints headlong into an immovable wall thinking he can crush it.

Human wisdom, understanding, counsel have no chance against the Lord. And this is why those who pursue righteousness and justice can rest assured in their ultimate victory, on their ultimate vindication.

The horse is made ready for the day of battle but the victory belongs to the Lord. As Jeremiah chapter 9, 23-24 says, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

[ 41 : 40 ] For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. As Emily shared during the prophecy, we live in a really broken world.

We live in a sinful world and we lament that, we mourn that. Wouldn't it be nice to live in a world where God's perfect justice reigns?

Wouldn't it be nice to live in a world where all the wicked are punished justly and all the righteous thrive and flourish? But that's not the world we live in.

And this points to something that is most important for us to understand. Do we always like to think of ourselves as being on the right side of history?

Do we always like to think of ourselves as being righteous? Scripture tells us, God's infallible word tells us, that there is no one righteous, no, not one.

[ 42 : 51 ] We think that those wicked people should be sacrificed for our flourishing, that they should be the ransom for the righteous. But in reality, we are like the rat that Lauren saw in her prophecy.

We are the scums of the earth, spiritually speaking. we are the rats, the filth of society that pollutes our streets, that should be exterminated.

We are the ones who should be the ransom for the righteous one, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. that is what justice looks like.

But instead, the righteous one, instead, Jesus Christ, for whom we should have been sacrificed, the righteous one gives his life and dies on the cross for our sins, for our vindication, for our salvation, so that we might live.

brothers and sisters, that's not justice. That's mercy. Jesus satisfies God's justice so that God might show mercy to undeserving people like us.

[ 44 : 19 ] if you want to live a life of righteousness and justice, the only way is to be gripped by the God whose steadfast love, whose faithfulness, whose righteousness and justice has made way for our salvation.

please take a moment to reflect on that. How is God speaking to you this morning through this passage, comforting you, convicting you?

And after you've reflected for a moment, we're going to respond corporately together by praying as a church. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.