

St Michael's Cornhill

THE CITY  
**NEW YEAR SERVICE**

12/01/2024

[www.st-michaels.org.uk](http://www.st-michaels.org.uk)

## Transcript of sermon delivered by Sir Jeremy Cooke

Readings: Matthew 2 v 13-18. Isaiah 53

### The Unjust Judge

Thank you all for your welcome and thank you to the Drapers Company as patrons of SMC and our hosts today. May I take the opportunity to commend the Corporation for its work, including the charitable giving in which it, and many of the livery companies, are involved. There are many here who play their part in that, as well as carrying weighty responsibility in the financial affairs of the City/ Country. Maybe, what you do is largely unrecognized outside of the walls of the city, but thanks are due to the Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, aldermen, masters and wardens, clerks, liverymen and freemen, as well as to the Governor for his oversight over the fiscal affairs of the nation.

We read today of the Slaughter of the Innocents as it is often called. Herod, a megalomaniac if ever there was one, in order to eradicate any potential rival, kills all the Bethlehem kids under 2 years old, but Joseph Mary & Jesus had got out in time. I am not making political points today about Hamas or Gaza, but annihilation of infants is appalling, isn't it? We cry out for justice, when such atrocities occur, when people are shafted, when PO managers are wrongly convicted. Justice must be done.

*Everyone says that they want justice, don't they? I have never met anyone who, in the abstract, did not think that justice should be done. What is the most usual complaint you hear from a child, from its earliest days, when they feel hard done by? It's not fair. And the parental response? Life isn't fair. That's how it is, and you had better get used to it. Instinctively we feel that it is not how it ought to be, because God made us in His image.*

People often say: *"if there is a God, why doesn't He do something about all the injustice, unfairness, wrongdoing and evil in the world? Why doesn't he stop murders, rapes, child abuse and genocide?"* And they use that as an argument for not believing in God. The idea that God is untroubled by serial murders, genocide or paedophilia is unthinkable, isn't it? *What would you think of a God who either saw no difference between good and evil or did nothing about it?*

Surely, He must do something. Isn't it inevitable that a good God will do justice and will, unlike human judges, get it absolutely right?

Jesus told a story of a bad judge, described as an unjust judge. This man was self-contained. He neither feared God nor cared what others thought of him. Having seen crime of all kinds and scandals in the city, he was world weary, hard bitten and cynical about justice and was seeing out his time on the bench until he could take up his index linked pension. There was a widow in that town who had been cheated, who kept making applications to him to get her case dealt with, but he could not be bothered with a litigant in person and did nothing. Eventually he got so fed up with her continual applications that he said to himself: *"Though I do not care about God, justice, truth or what the LC (Minister of Justice) thinks of me, this widow keeps pestering me, people can see it, the press might get hold of it and I will not get any peace until I deal with her case.* So, he had her case listed and was shamed into dealing with it properly. Jesus said- *If that is what a world- weary corrupt judge does, the one thing you can be absolutely certain of is that God will ultimately bring about justice.* But Justice involves judgment.

People balk at the idea of God judging. But *He must, mustn't He?* Yet He does not do so now, and some people complain of that too, when they see the consequences of evil in the suffering of humanity. *People ask me: Why doesn't God do something to stop it? Then I ask: what exactly is it that you want God to do now?*

Do you want Him to stop giving people the opportunity to make choices?

Or do you want Him to eliminate the evil consequences of those choices?

*But that's not enough, is it?* So, do you want Him to eliminate evil itself?

But what evil? All wrongdoing? And all those who commit it or are responsible for it? The child abuser -the terrorist - the shoplifter yes- but your little girl who fibs. Your son when he deliberately disobeys you - your own selfishness/ peccadillos?

Or to intervene at some intermediate level somewhere between the two extremes as you see them? *And, if so, where is the line to be drawn?*

Perhaps you want Him to sort out the wrongs which others have done to you, or to those with whom you feel affinity, but not those wrongs you have done to others. Or just the most obvious gross examples of crime, but nothing in any area where you might possibly be seen to be at fault. Destroy the evil in others, that's fine- but leave my little failings out of it. That does not sound very moral or much like justice, does it?

The real problem is that we are all on the wrong end of justice where God is concerned because none of us treat God properly. We don't love Him with all of our being and we don't love our neighbour as ourselves. We leave God out for much of the time. If God is to do justice, you and I are in the dock. Isaiah had it right. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.* We live to please ourselves.

*But The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* That is what Jesus came for. The child whom Herod wanted to kill actually came to die *as a lamb led to the slaughter*, but in a criminal execution outside Jerusalem, not as a child in Bethlehem. That was the ultimate in unjust convictions. *Yet*, we read that *it pleased the Lord. Why?*

Because this ultimate injustice is the way God deals with all injustice/evil. He takes it all on Himself, including its consequences, in our place, if we will only accept it. As man's attempt to do away with God, it is actually God's way of taking responsibility for it all. He takes the blame, as Isaiah said He would. *You want justice/evil sorted?* It should start here and now with us. But what we need is mercy. Jesus' follower, Peter, explains in a letter in the NT why God does not do justice and eliminate all evil here and now (us). It is to give us a chance of accepting God's solution to our wrong and guilt. *Why not take away one of the accounts of Jesus' life and death that are at the back of the church to find out more about how that works?* Be assured: Justice will come - Justice will be done.

We pride ourselves at St Michael's on giving people the space to consider the Christian faith afresh. Click [here](#) if you would like to hear more about a guided read-through of one of the eye-witness accounts of the life of Jesus.