

Perfect Justice

✖ The concept of justice has always intrigued me. Even more interesting is the way that justice is dispensed throughout the world.

England and Wales practice English law. This system is based on common law that, as defined by Wikipedia, “is determined by judges sitting in courts applying common sense and knowledge of legal precedent to the facts before them.”

In Mexico, criminal defendants are considered guilty until proven innocent. Fortunately for the accused, there is no death penalty in Mexico, or most Latin American countries for that matter.

Then there’s the unforgiving and brutal approach to justice commonly known as sharia law (or Islamic law). Practiced in varying degrees in places like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Nigeria, offenses such as petty theft can result in amputation of hands and feet while more “egregious” crime such as adultery and highway robbery can end in execution.

When you compare those institutions against the one we have access to here in the United States, I think it’s pretty safe to say ours is the best in the world. Every individual, no matter what the offense, is entitled to representation and has the opportunity to have his or her case heard by a peer-based jury with oversight from an impartial judge.

If you happened to read my previous blog titled “Juror No. 3”, you might recall that I was called to jury duty last month for the second time in 10 years. The defendant was convicted on two accounts that stemmed from a firearm incident. The combined sentence was 50 years.

One of the most interesting things that happened during the

process occurred moments after the final verdict and sentence was read. As the defendant was being placed in handcuffs, he became noticeably agitated. He started talking to the security guard and his attorney. Then, another juror noticed, he started pointing at one of the jurors. As he was escorted out, the defense attorney asked to speak with the judge and the state prosecutors. They then asked the youngest juror (still in his teens) to step into the judge's chambers.

We didn't find out for sure until later, but our speculation of what had happened turned out to be true. The defendant had thrown a proverbial "Hail Mary" pass by claiming that he knew one of the jurors. The juror denied knowing the defendant and the trial was effectively over.

It wasn't until hearing Pastor Joe Cook (my pastor at Hope Church here in Broken Arrow, Okla.) preach two Sundays back about the final words of Christ that I realized the amazing similarity between what the defendant in our case tried to do and something that happened on the cross.

Most people familiar with the Easter story will remember the two thieves who were hanging on crosses to the left and right of Jesus (as described in Luke 23:32-43). After one of the men hurled insults at the Son of God (v. 39), the other gave a passionate defense on His behalf (v. 40).

He then turned to the Christ and uttered these oft-quoted words: "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (v. 42, HCSB)

It's hard to say what was the thief's motivation. Some argue he had seen the light and was sincere in his cry for help, but let's be real here. Just like the defendant that I helped put in prison, this man was probably making a last gasp effort to be rescued from his death sentence.

So here's Jesus; His mangled, mutilated body nailed to a cross. He's suffering from excruciating, unfathomable pain and

just a few short hours from taking His last breath.

And suddenly, an argument breaks out between two common criminals about the identity of Jesus. It seems almost fitting that even unto His death, the people around Him were debating His claims.

If Jesus were an average man, it's likely He would have brushed off the thief's request or worse, cursed at him for disturbing whatever peace was left to be found. If Jesus were a legalistic man, it's likely He would have told the thief, "Sorry man, it's too late. You should have believed in Me when you had the chance."

But instead, Jesus, in His glorious grace, spoke these words: "I assure you: Today you will be with Me in paradise." (v. 43, HCSB)

As much as I appreciate the American judicial system, it pails in comparison to the perfect kind of justice that comes from a holy and righteous God. It doesn't matter if you find Christ as a child or if you accept His salvation on death row or on your death bed. The result is still the same: eternal life.

Jesus' response shouldn't be a surprise to anyone who has ever read Matthew 20:1-16. In one of His parables, He tells about a landowner who hired men to work in his vineyard at various times throughout the day. At the end of the day, he paid all of the men equal wages no matter how many hours they worked.

Jesus summed up the story by saying, "So the last will be first, and the first last." (v. 16)

In the parable, the men who worked a full day were enraged when the men who only worked two or three hours received the same payment. Unfortunately, many long-time Christians can fall into the same trap if their not careful. That's because we tend to look at justice from the world's perspective. We don't look at it from God's perspective who has one agenda in

mind: To be reunited with all of mankind no matter what the cost.

Why do you think He sent His only Son to Earth as a perfect sacrifice for our sins? He was so desperate to restore fellowship with us, that He allowed Jesus to lower Himself to Earth and become a common man. And then, He made Jesus that focal point of a plan that would cause Him to suffer immensely and ultimately lose His life-even if for three days.

I'll take that form of justice any day of the week. Quite frankly, if all of my sins and shortcomings were used as evidence against me in a trial that was being measured by God's law, I'd be in a lot of trouble. And if I had to rely on a jury of my own peers to decide my innocence or guilt, well, let's just say that as judgmental as people are these days, that probably wouldn't work out too well either.

So as you prepare for Easter weekend, be reminded of God's awesome grace and be thankful that, when it comes to biblical justice, we don't have to get what we deserve.

Chad Bonham is a freelance author, journalist and television and documentary producer from Broken Arrow, Okla. He has authored several books including a four-book FCA series (Regal Books) and is the coordinating producer on a forthcoming documentary called Choosing Life.