



### INTRODUCTION:

Our Subject for consideration today is really a question, **Is it Well?**

Because too often we measure our WELL-ness based on things like how we feel. So if I were to measure that right now after spending yesterday packing boxes, helping my daughter load a bunk bed in a trailer, and shifting furniture around my house. If I measured my WELLNESS by that, I would not be **well at all!** But that is what we typically do. We measure whether it is well based on how we feel. Or based on good health, healthy finances, whether our children or grandchildren are doing well in school or life, whether we are on target with our vision board plans, whether our retirement income is in place OR how wisely we have given charitably by the end of the year. But **is it- really- well?**

### BACKGROUND:

The writer of this 112th Psalm reminds us in the **very first verse**, that the most important measure of our wellness, or our well-being, is not how we feel, or how our plans are manifesting or the condition our children or grandchildren are in. But the most important measure of our wellness is our relationship with God. And because of our relationship with God, our ABILITY to praise God, no matter what we are going through.

To praise God whether it's while enduring this backache, or the many heartaches I have had and YOU have had to endure. Whether it is in the midst of our fears, or our doubts, our trauma, our grief, our cynicism. Every now and then we ought to be able to declare like the psalmist, **Praise the Lord!** Anyhow!

### ILLUSTRATION:

One of the lowest points in my life was when I found out one of my children was sexually assaulted and I could not protect them. That I could not see it coming, that I didn't pick up on the signs sooner. And I felt like a complete failure.

It was so painful watching my child wrestle through all of the physical and emotional and spiritual pain of it all. I was mad at myself, I was mad at God, I was mad at the rapists. And

I felt like I was going to LOSE it. I tried to pray my way through, but I couldn't pray. I could not find the words to express the pain and guilt and **rage** I was feeling. But in the midst of ALL of it. All of the turmoil and trauma and grief, ONE day I just began singing out of nowhere, **Praise Him. Praise Him. Praise Him. Praise Him. Jesus! Blessed Savior! He's worthy to be praised!** And as the PRAISE left my mouth in an INSTANT, I began to feel this openness and this LIFT, and like a ton of bricks that was on my shoulders had dropped, and I felt open and as light as a feather.

**ILLUSTRATION 2:** I felt like the way I **imagine** the woman with the issue of blood felt when she was finally able to push herself through the crowd, touch the hem of Jesus's garment, and was INSTANTLY healed. She felt her RELIEF in that very moment and so did I.

And as the Spirit of God was ministering to ME and healing ME, I was able to minister to my child. And I watched God turn my child that was slipping into a DEEP depression and cutting herself for relief, begin to transform and allow God to soothe her mind, body and soul. I saw her joy come back, her hope came back, and she even began to minister to other young people who had experienced the same thing.

So I learned FIRST HAND what PRAISE can do. That GOD inhabits, dwells in, LIVES IN the praises of God's people. *Psalms 22:3* And when God shows up, everything has to change, has to surrender, has to submit to the power and presence of God. That's why when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted, and his train filling the temple the angels broke out in praise crying out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is **FULL** of his glory." (*Isaiah 6:1*)

But their PRAISE also impacted Isaiah who for the first time in YEARS was able to see himself and his community the way that GOD saw them, which repositioned Isaiah where he needed to be and he was able to both warn the people of GOD and offer them hope that the Holy Seed, their savior and our savior, Jesus the Christ was coming and would change the world in time and eternity.

So we have to PRACTICE praising God in season and out of season, no matter who we are, what we are going through... "let [everyone and] everything that has breath. Praise the Lord!" (*Psalms 150*)

**BACKGROUND:**

Now this ONE psalm is packed FULL of sermons, but for our time together, we are going to focus on verse 5. *“It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.” (Psalms 112:5)*

Now I have to confess, that God began unfolding this message early this week as I was driving home from staff meeting on Tuesday. And whenever God speaks to me early, I already know my week is going to be hellacious. But I don’t always know what the thing is that will make my days or nights difficult. But it just seemed to be too simple to focus only on verse 5. To preach about the way we give to others. I didn’t trust it and I told Amy Kim to pray because I was pushing through all week and yesterday my daughter and the grands did not finish moving out until about 6PM.

And so when I finally had the time to meditate last night. I realized that my daughter’s journey the past few years from losing her apartment, to living with me, to now owning her first house was all a part of this message about the way that we GIVE to others. That our giving should not just be charitable or even just cheerful, but that God is calling God’s people to **GIVE with justice**. But what does that mean? What does it mean to GIVE with justice?

### **First, Justice Giving is NOT Charity Giving**

As Christians, followers of the Way of Jesus, children of God, we have pretty much been socialized to give to others. But there is a condescending nature to giving from a charity lens. From a lens of I have more than you and I want to bless you with a one-time or sometimes monthly gift, so that your situation in life will be just a little better and I can feel a little better. But the problem with giving as a charity ONLY is that it only addresses situations **TEMPORARILY** and does not impact the structure that propagates poverty. It doesn’t address the **ROOT** causes. It shelters a man for a night, provides a temporary safety for a woman being abused, provides food for a child... and in that **moment** it is needed and welcomed by those in need, because they can eat for that day, be safe for that night. But it’s pulling babies out of the water.

**ILLUSTRATION:** No doubt some of you know the popular story of the man who walks by a river, and he’s watching another man jumping in the water and pulling babies out, trying his best to keep them from drowning. And it is overwhelming because there are so many drowning babies. The man watching stops the man who is pulling the babies out of the water, and he says

to him, “What are doing? You cannot save all of the babies! It is an impossible thing to do, so you pulling them out one at a time, is NOT MAKING a DIFFERENCE! Then the other man runs back to the river and pulls another drowning baby out, points to the baby and says, “Well it makes a difference to THIS one”.

And it DOES make a difference to that one, it does matter. It IS important to get as many babies as possible out of harm’s way, if even for a moment. But Is it Well with that baby the next day, the next week, the next month or year? If they are always **at risk** of drowning from hunger, from homelessness, from debt, from violence, from chronic illness and disease. **Is it REALLY Well?**

If you are the one, pulling the babies out. Addressing immediate needs with your wealth, does your giving ever grow beyond that to examining the river? Or what or who or how they ended up drowning in the water, then applying all your efforts and resources to **shift** and **share** THAT power? Because it is important to BOTH meet the immediate needs of people **AND** change the system that got them there in the first place. **THAT** will make us All well! Not just charity giving.

#### **ILLUSTRATION:**

There are a lot of good Christian naysayers in this movement of giving with JUSTICE. Like the MOVEMENT of **Black Reparations**. As an American culture and society in general we did not have problem, nor did we complicate to this extent reparations to our Jewish Holocaust siblings or our siblings ravaged by the system of Japanese Internment which took their land, the houses and thriving businesses of Japanese-Americans some who had been here for four generations and STILL imprisoned them. Even a FEW of our Indigenous Siblings have received SOME form of reparations, AND most did not.

But the **anti-blackness** in our culture is so THICK that we have over analyzed **who** is black, **what** was taken, **how** it was taken, and for **how long** it was taken that we have become paralyzed to actually implement changes that are structural and sustainable.

The City and the County committing to \$500,000 in their budgets annually was not because they easily listened to the wisdom of the very **black** people **they** vetted to serve on the

Reparations Commission. But it was an unnecessarily complicated process which required the input of many of YOU and countless others across multiple segments of Asheville that made it happen.

Now like pulling the babies out of the water. Many folks including some of us here that have *wealth and riches in our houses (v.3)* are happy to drop some money in the pot of black reparations. But are you willing to expand your justice giving and support a strategy to shift and share power and explicitly build BLACK wealth that will last for generations so that others can be well?

I believe that all the attempts across Asheville and this nation that continue to be stalled when it comes to black reparations is because we have done charity so long, which always sustains supremacy culture and existing systemic strongholds of power, that we cannot imagine anything else. AND this country has stolen so much from **black people**, extracted so much labor **FROM** black people and for so long, EVEN until this day, that if we tell the TRUTH we don't want to give up anything that we have. But how much do we need? We cannot live in but ONE house at a time, we cannot sleep in but ONE bed at a time, use ONE toilet, drive ONE car.

It is absolutely SIN-FUL for folks who live by themselves or with JUST their spouse and LIVE in a 6+ bedroom house and don't have children, other relatives or even friends that visit. It doesn't make sense, even if it IS an investment. It is just GREEDY and ungodly.

#### **ILLUSTRATION**

I know a couple who both tutored children in our after-school program. They had retired in Brevard after selling their house in Florida for some ridiculous amount. So because they **could**, not because they needed it, but just wanted MORE...they bought this HUGE mansion that set on the side of the mountain. They were old when they moved there, but as they got even older, they could not even get up and down the stairs to the bedroom.

But instead of downsizing and possibly renting the house, they held on until the wife died which was not long after they moved there. And the husband had no support, because though they built this house, they had not built caring relationships with their students or their families, their neighbors or other volunteers. And left alone, the husband, even with all that he

had, was a **miserable** soul. It was NOT well with him, because he had a charity mindset and he never figured out Justice Giving.

Giving with CHARITY is just a temporary fix. It is not sustainable. It does not restore the wholeness of that person. It does not build relationship. It does not shift or share power. The status quo is not interrupted. And the dependency of those persons on the benevolence of those in power is always sustained.

It is often this paternalistic or maternalistic relationship between the giver and the receiver that is simply transactional, but there is no JOY, there is no transformation, and it can be so depleting for everyone involved. Of course, it is an EXTREMELY comfortable place for many folks to BE, BUT charity giving is NOT Justice Giving.

**But this passage's focus is Justice Giving** and a personal illustration of that goes back to my daughter and grand-kids:

A few years ago, my daughter Jasmine moved to Spartanburg, SC from Burlington, NC after going through a divorce. Two years into that she reconnected with an old boyfriend that she grew up with, which is how Amias came into the picture. But while she was pregnant with him and working in and out of cars on the night shift at BMW, she could no longer physically do the work. She lost the income, got behind on rent, and because she trying to handle things herself, she did not tell me or her dad what was happening and got all of her rent, but was STILL evicted.

This was just after moratoriums on rent were removed. So many landlords who were forced into a rent moratorium during the early days of COVID, immediately focused on recouping their losses the minute it ended. Now I fully understand that most people rent property to make money. That SOME landlords wrestled with this moral dilemma to extend grace to their tenants. BUT when your tenant pays you what they owe you and you STILL evict them, because you can now get a higher rent, you are pursuing profit over the well-being of people in an ongoing pandemic. **Is it well with you?**

Now I moved the Spartanburg right at that time, so she and my grandchildren were able to come and live with me. But how many women and their children, men, elderly, differently

able people, **human beings** were also caught up and evicted and had NOWHERE to go that YOU knew about. **Is it well?**

Remember I told you in the beginning that the most important part of this Psalm is our praise of God. Now me and my daughter were both praying feverishly first for her to find another apartment. But the thing about an eviction in S.C. is that every landlord who has an apartment for rent also has a listing of every eviction. So my daughter was denied repeatedly. She was working, had cash money to pay them for the deposit and first month's rent, but that EVICTION was like the Scarlett Letter and no-one would rent to her. Then as weeks and months passed by she would get THIS close to renting and someone **without** an eviction would offer to pay more, and that apartment was gone.

She would get so frustrated, and I was frustrated, because I had been an empty nester for 12 plus years and now I have four children and a daughter I have not lived with since she was 17. But God and some of you kept encouraging me and I kept encouraging her to trust God no matter what she was experiencing, in spite of all of the rejections, and all of the NO's. I believed those NO's were GOD's **NOT YET**... because God was preparing a place JUST for her and my grandchildren. And ALL of the **NO'S** that she heard would make God's **YES** that much sweeter!

I believed that! AND I had no clue how or what God was going to do. And then one Sunday after I preached at Land of Sky UCC, someone overheard me talking about living in Spartanburg and they were from Spartanburg so I asked them if they knew of anyone that had a place to rent. I told them about the eviction, about all the no's and that she really just needed to opportunity. So they put the word out and actually began looking at the rental market in Spartanburg. And when they discovered how high the rent was, their conclusion was that it was too **unjust** to pay that much money a month for something she could never own. So here is God! They offered to put up all the money to BUY her a house and she pay them back with ZERO interest. Praise the Lord!

I don't have to tell you how MUCH I praised God for that! Because that was nobody BUT God and THAT was giving with JUSTICE. Because it was not just bailing her out of a bill, or paying for a temporary need, but the justice in THAT giving, was that it IMMEDIATELY shifted

her well-being. It provided her with a hope she has not had in years. It changed her countenance, her outlook on life, it restored her dignity and self-worth AND it positioned her to build wealth for her own children. It gave them a sense of stability and security that could not just be swept from under them. Yes! Giving with charity makes US feel good. But giving with JUSTICE makes GOD feel good because it is fruitful, it's healing and not only does it endure for generations, but the psalmist declares that it endures forever!

**Conclusion:** In closing, when you COMMIT to Justice Giving. It WILL be well. So don't get distracted or discouraged by the naysayers. Because the very last verse leaves us with some Good News...that ALL of their ill will of the naysayers, their evil tidings, bad mouthing, shaming, gaslighting, all of their wickedness will come- to -NOTHING. It won't even matter. So give with JUSTICE anyway. Seek to transform livelihoods ANYWAY. Impact generations ANYWAY. NOT just situations. **Then it will be well for us all.**

*In the name of the Father...Son...Holy Ghost!*