



The Main Meal is Coming...the Elusive Nature of Justice in Shades of Gray

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"I want to see a mighty flood of justice...a torrent of doing good"

– **Amos 5:24 (LB)** True justice is elusive. When **Baltimore State Attorney** Marilyn J. Mosby charged six police officers in the death of Freddie Gray, the air was filled with jubilation as people danced in the street. We are prone to engage in a hollow pre-celebration at the time when police officers are charged for heinous crimes. Remember, this is just the

appetizer, not the main meal. America does not convict police officers guilty of criminal behavior, even with forensic evidence and live video camera. There are similarities in the narratives dealing with Mike Brown in Ferguson, Travon Martin in Florida, and Eric Garner in Staten Island, whose last words were *"I can't breathe"* for illegally selling worthless cigarettes, approximately ten miles from Wall Street where major thievery is the order of the day. The conclusion of those cases have been unbelievable. When law enforcement personnel are accused of doing bad things, they follow a script. The Police Union enshrouds them with secrecy while conservative news pundits begin a blame the victim campaign, that will demonize the Prosecutor and victim. Remember, the media shapes public opinion. The police union will hire its best defense lawyers, because they believe they are entitled to what is commonly labeled *"due process."* Simple justice is all we desire as a people. We are not objects, slaves or flotsam jetsam floating on the sea of humanity, we are the consequence of our Creators grand design. We expect and will not settle for nothing less than simple justice in a court of law. I am neither pro-police or anti-police. With gusto, I am radically pro-justice. I honestly doubt there will be criminal convictions for the Baltimore police officers charged in the senseless death of Freddie Gray. I believe this case will end up being a civil suit where the family of the deceased victim will be initially awarded a major amount of money that will be later reduced by the city on appeal, and we will return to business as usual.

From the streets to the White House we heard that this nation is guided by the rule of law. That phrase now frightens me as I see the proliferation of massive police power and the presence of the National Guard brandishing their weapons in the face of protesters and rioters. Rule of law is translated to mean law and order which invariably translates into unwieldy order without law. It is the pretext for whipping unruly people into place by the use of what is perceived as legal force. How close are we to becoming a police state? When repression is imposed to the exclusion of freedom and responsibility, the groundwork is laid for a ruthless to-tali-tarian police state. Mussolini, Hitler and tyrants from the past imposed order to whip people into shape. We use curfews, arrest and brute force to put people in place and believe we have solved our problem. God forbid that we will intentionally not discuss the true meaning of freedom and responsibility. With the mass intelligence gathered from protest and riots from the last four decades, why are we repeating the same tactics and approach to control crowd behavior?

Relationships are Preventive. Pastors come out of your air conditioned church offices and walk the streets of your community. Police officers get out of your cruisers and walk the streets and get to know people by a handshake rather than with handcuffs. These are the people you will be meeting in a social uprising or riot. And they will remember you. I flinch when pastors attempt to rush me to their study after doing ministry. Authentic relationships take quality time. People can share a lot in sixty seconds. Do you know the people to whom you minister? We must first admit that there is a societal crisis among us that is undergirded by distrust and a misplaced sense of values. When people are devalued in a society that places more worth on athletes than school teachers we are headed toward the jungle. Teachers engage their students in better learning modules when they work through relationships. It is imperative that Police officers and Ministers build lasting and sustained relationships before a crisis erupts.

Pretense Must Never Substitute for true Justice God does not despise worship, it is pretense. The prophet Amos was outraged at the abuse of justice in his time. Two closely allied ideas are present in the use of the term. The formal use of justice has to do with the administration of justice in the due process of law. The second notion demands that there be fairness and equity embedded in the rule of law and that these be properly enforced in a fair manner. There are various kinds of justice: *remedial justice* deals with the setting right of wrongs; *retributive justice* punishes or penalizes the individual for wrong conduct and misdeeds; *distributive justice* deals with the distribution of goods, services, healthcare educational opportunities, protection from threats. Many conditions must be met for an act of distribution to be fair. It must be understood that judicial decisions in ancient Israel were viewed as God's decision because they were based on God's revealed will. (see Deut. 17: 8-13). The administration of justice in the Old Testament was considered to be theocentric (God centered) in principle. Because judicial decisions were administered in God's name, absolute impartiality and strict fairness in accord with God's character was expected. (see 2 Chronicles 19:4-11) When the nation failed to live up to these ideals, they were denounced by the prophets. (see Isaiah 1: 23, 5:7) The poor were most likely to suffer a deprivation of their rights due to the breakdown of the proper administration of law and justice.

A Concluding Word of Warning It was the doing of justice that God was stressing through his prophets (see Micah 6:8 MLB) "*He hath declared unto you, Oh man what is good, and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?*" Unfortunately, the problem in our nation is similar to ancient Israel. It is pretense. Let's suppose for a moment that our judicial system was theocentric as in Ancient Israel, the outcome would be different. Gunnar Myrdal decades ago called it an American dilemma (the title of his book). The gap between what we espouse as an ideal and what we practice in reality. When protesters from Ferguson to Baltimore shout in strident language, "*no justice, no peace*" they are pointing to the hypocrisy in this nation when it comes to respect for Black life. They are saying loudly to an insensitive criminal justice system that devalues Black life. if justice is not meted out fairly, no one will enjoy true peace. Hopefully, we avoid what James Baldwin refers to as ***The Fire Next Time***. From Baltimore to Tel Aviv where Ethiopians are currently protesting injustice...**BLACK LIFE MATTERS.**

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