

What does God require

Micah 6:1-8

Every now and then a pastor comes up against a sermon that they struggle to write. This is one such time. While Micah 6 is a scripture we need right now, it is not a message that is easy to hear. Why? Because Micah 6:1-8 tells us in very clear terms what God desires most and what is required of us if we want to truly call ourselves God's children.

About 3500 years ago (give or take) God entered into a covenant agreement with the Hebrew people, through Moses. In short, by this agreement God said to the Hebrew people: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." If the people of God were obedient, they would gain the Lord's favor. If they were not, there would be punishment. So, to help Israel understand obedience, God gave his people explicit instructions as to how to conduct themselves. The first is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-6 - *Hear, O Israel: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.*" We find the second in Leviticus 19:18 - *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."*

Sound familiar? Well, it should...Jesus basically said the same thing in Matthew 22 when asked, “what is the greatest commandment”. Jesus replied that we are to Love God and to Love others as ourselves. Seeing that people like formulas, this should have worked out, right? The problem was, and still is today, that humans want to do things on their own terms. We like to think that we know best.

So, here we are in Micah. Micah was a prophet in southern Judah around 750 B.C. He was well aware of the social ills of his day. At the time, Israel was in a state of moral and social decay and because of that here in Chapter 6, the Lord serves His people with a lawsuit. In verse 2 Micah tells them: “Hear... the Lord’s accusation; For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.” Why is God lodging a complaint? Disobedience, the disobedience of His people. To “prove” God’s lawsuit is valid he reminds Israel of all the ways He has been faithful: (vs.4) God has brought the people out of Egypt and redeemed them from slavery. He has sent them righteous leaders: Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

Do you remember what happened when your children acted up and you had to confront them about being disobedient? Or maybe even when you were a child? There was the litany of excuses about WHY and “what do you want from me”. That’s EXACTLY how Israel reacts to God’s lawsuit. In verses 6-7 Israel begins to complain, “But God...What do you want from us? What can we do to appease you O God? Should

we bow down before you? You would rather we sacrifice burnt offerings to you...a one year old calf, a thousand rams, ten thousand rivers of oil, or how about our first born?" Feeling the weight of divine judgement, Israel asks what they can do to make amends, basically attempting to "buy" God's forgiveness. With each "offering" presented Israel goes from a standard burnt offering (a young calf) to the extreme (offering their firstborn). Were they trying to being a bunch of smart alecks? No, they were trying to satisfy God without changing their sinful actions - outward actions that would never hide who they truly were inside. In this courtroom scene, Israel is trying to fulfill legal requirements with empty ritual rather than the "good" God already has commanded—to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God. God does not desire superficial rituals, but a heart that lives out of obedience.

The reason writing this sermon was hard is that I am struggling with the direction our own country is headed towards right now. It is not political to oppose humans killing humans all in the name of law and order. It is not political to be outraged when children are detained and separated from their families and communities in the name of public safety. I cannot watch the news day after day and be OK with the violent rhetoric that is being thrown around masked as justice and righteous. My heart is angry and outraged and saddened and crushed.

So, I turn to God and God says, “act justly”. There is part of me that wants to be in Minneapolis and join other clergy who are peacefully protesting and be arrested if I must so that justice can be seen.

So, I turn to God and God says, “love mercy” and part of me wants to find that young Latino boy who was recently detained by ICE while his father was arrested and scoop him up and protect him while he is in a detention center far away from his family and remind him, he is not alone. People care and love still exists in this world.

So, I turn to God and God says, “walk humbly” but part of me wants to scream and yell at every single individual who keeps defending these actions as lawful as they spread lies about both those who have been killed and those who have done the killing. In doing so they sow more hatred that divides us and pits us against one another. While my heart wants to go out and “make all things right” I know better. Because even if I tried, I would only be relying on my own strength and would be no better than Israel in Micah 6.

What if Micah had started out with “walk humbly with your God”? When one walks humbly with the Lord, it means they rely on God for ALL things. It implies a daily walk of dependence on God rather than self-importance or pride. It involves acknowledging God in all decisions, being teachable, and recognizing that one's abilities come from the Lord. Once that is your normal pattern, (walking humbly with God) then

acting justly (doing what is right) and loving mercy (showing compassion to all) will come naturally. In daily walking with God, one naturally is fair in all dealings, protects the innocent, and stands up for the marginalized. In walking with God, one goes from simply going through the motions to loving kindness and compassion with their whole being. Once that occurs forgiveness comes from the heart, and caring for those in need happens without expecting anything in return. That is what God desires, for us to place ourselves in His hands so that He can take us to love, care for, and protect, and then to help us help those around us.

Here is a poem written by Amanda Gorman in memory of Alex Pretti, the nurse who was killed by ICE this past week. She writes, “Our greatest threat isn’t the outsiders among us, but those among us who never look within. Fear not those without papers, but those without conscience. Know that to care intensely, united, is to carry both pain-dark horror for today and profound, daring hope for tomorrow. We can feel we have nothing to give, and still believe this world waiting, trembling, to change. If we cannot find words, may we find the will; if we ever love hope, may we never lose our humanity. The only undying is mercy, the courage to open ourselves like doors, hug our neighbor, and save one more bright, impossible life.”

I don’t exactly know what God is calling you to do, how to act justly or how to love mercy. Truthfully, I don’t quite know what God is calling me to either. But I do know that we need to start by seeing each other as

God sees us. We need to stop allowing others to divide us into “us” vs. “them” and treat each other as we would want to be treated. We need to depend on God to show us how to act justly each day; small actions that show kindness, love, and care. So, take time to walk humbly with God this next week. Spend time in God’s presence and ask what you can do to bring justice and kindness right here, right now. Maybe your role in all this is to be a prayer warrior. Maybe your role in all this is to support organizations that are the boots on the ground where there is unrest. Maybe your role in all this is to find ways to bring light and love to those around you so that the great divide between us doesn’t grow. I know we can’t solve every injustice we are seeing right now, but I do know that we can be God’s light to someone each and every day. So, brothers and sisters, keep spreading hope. This is what God requires.

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