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Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Micah 6:1-8

What do you want to be when you grow up? I don't even think it is politically correct to ask that question anymore, something about defining kids by work too early in their lives, but in my day, we got that question a lot. Did anyone ever ask you that one? How did you respond?

Fifty years ago, the standard responses were usually, teacher, nurse, doctor, secretary or astronaut. Today, the most likely answer is, "You tube" star. For whatever reason, I wanted to be a lawyer. I don't really know why. My mom wasn't a lawyer. My dad wasn't either. We didn't have any friends who were lawyers. I honestly can't remember what prompted me to want to be a lawyer at eight years of age. Perhaps it was *Perry Mason*. Anyone remember *Perry Mason*? I used to watch reruns of this legal drama on TV when I was a kid. It starred Canadian Raymond Burr as Perry Mason, an LA criminal defense attorney. I would watch each week enthralled as Mason argued the case and always came out the victor.

Or maybe it was, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Anyone read this book by Harper Lee? It was assigned reading for me in Grade 7. The story of prominent lawyer Atticus Finch agreeing to defend an innocent black man accused of rape in racially divided American south in the 1930's.

Or maybe a little later, it was the John Grisham novels, *The Firm*, *The Client* and *The Pelican Brief*. I read them all.

Or it could have even been the Tom Cruise movie, *A Few Good Men*. In the movie, Cruise played Naval Attorney Daniel Kaffee and there is that wonderful scene where he cross examines Base Commander Nathan Jessup played by Jack Nicholson. Things get a little heated in the course of

the questioning. Nicholson says, *You want answers?* Cruise responds, *I want the truth! You can't handle the truth*, Nicholson shouts back. *You can't handle the truth* has become an iconic statement in our culture.

More recently, I have marveled at the brilliance of corporate lawyer, Harvey Specter, in the television legal drama, *Suits*. A show most famous perhaps, for starring the current bride of Prince Harry, Meghan Markle.

I don't know why I wanted to be a lawyer as a young child, perhaps I have always been intrigued with a good defense. Taking all the facts and doing the research and then piecing them together. Laying out all the details and then working to a good conclusion that is sound and logical. Interesting, I didn't become a lawyer but I did become a preacher. I guess it never really dawned on me how similar what I do most weeks is like the closing arguments of a lawyer.

Today, we find ourselves in the fourth week of our summer message series at North Park entitled, *Majoring on the Minors*. It is a series on the Minor Prophets in the bible. Their writings comprise the last twelve books of the Old Testament. They're described as "minor" not because they're less important than the books of the Major Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, but because they're shorter in length. These books contain some challenging words mostly directed at God's people, the Israelites, by his chosen spokesmen, the prophets. Why? It is because they had forgotten or disregarded the relationship they had with God, Yahweh and had turned and worshipped other gods. They had been unfaithful and rebellious towards their heavenly Father. All hope is not lost, however.

The Minor Prophets also serve to remind the people of God's faithful and restorative love. So far in this series, we have been challenged by the words of the prophets Hosea, Habakkuk and Obadiah and today we come to Micah.

Let me give you a bit of background about Micah before we dive into the text. Micah lived during the time of Isaiah, around 730 BC. He lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Remember, because of their disobedience to God, Israel had split in half. Now, there was the nation of Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Micah lived in the south in a town called, Moresheth.

As a prophet, Micah warned the Israelites about their disobedience and rebellion towards God and His impending judgement on them but as I said last week, the message of all of the prophets in the bible is that God's judgement is not his final word. There is always hope. There is always this anticipation that a new day is dawning and Micah also speaks to this hope. What is interesting about the passage that we are looking at today is that it is laid out like a lawsuit brought by God against his people. Isn't that interesting? It is a covenant lawsuit.

Do you remember a few weeks ago when we talked about the prophet Hosea and how God used his marriage to Gomer, who was a prostitute as an illustration of how God's chosen people had been unfaithful to him? God had made a covenant with his people and petitioned them to be faithful to Him alone just as a marriage covenant between a husband and wife binds them to solitary devotion.

But the Israelites have broken that covenant and been unfaithful to God by worshipping other gods. Things have reached a head in the book of Micah, with increasing corruption among the leaders and even some of the prophets and God now brings them to court, so to speak. He lays out his charges against the people just as a lawyer would lay out the case they have against a defendant.

If you have your bibles, turn with me to Micah. It goes Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. If you get to Nahum and Habakkuk you have gone too far. Listen to the start of Micah 6 again.

Micah 6:1-2

Listen to what the LORD is saying:

"Stand up and state your case against me.

Let the mountains and hills be called to witness your complaints.

² And now, O mountains,

listen to the LORD's complaint!

He has a case against his people.

He will bring charges against Israel.

Notice the word, "listen" is repeated twice here. That is significant because the people are not listening. This is the dilemma in the time of Micah. Some think that everything is fine and that God should be happy with them but they have not been listening to what the prophets have been saying over the years.

Have you ever had that experience? Someone around you, a child, a spouse or a friend, just have not been listening to you. You don't feel heard. You have been trying to relay an important message and they are just not comprehending the seriousness of it. You say, *listen* to get their attention. *Listen*. Finally, it's, *Listen to me!* And you place yourself right in front of them eye to eye, desperate to get their attention.

God has been calling his people to listen to his words of warning for too long. *Hey guys, the relationship is a mess. We have to do something before it is too late.* But he gets no response. This lawsuit is a final wake-up call. *You want the truth? You can't handle the truth.*

As Micah begins to lay out the case a la Harvey Specter, based on the characteristics of a lawsuit in this day, his audience around him probably quickly realizes the significance of the analogy he is using. It is surprising to them, however. I think it is surprising to many of us. God brings a lawsuit against his own people? I thought God said we should never take anyone to court? Have they done something so wrong that even God is turning against them? After getting his people's attention, God then calls his spokesman, Micah to stand and plead his case before the mountains because the heavens and earth were witnesses when God first made his covenant with his people on Mount Sinai way back in Exodus, the second book of the bible. Do you remember it?

In **Micah 6:2** it says that God has a case against his people and he will bring charges.

Have you ever been charged with anything? For some of you here, you have stood in court and been formally charged with breaking a law and at the moment those charges are read out, the magnitude of what you have done weighs upon you.

I have never been to court to face serious criminal charges but the summer of the year I turned 16, I got my first speeding ticket. I remember the weight of the words of the police officer that pulled me over, *You have been charged under the Highway Traffic Act with going 70 km/hr in a 50 km/hr speed zone.* Wow, I have been charged with breaking the law! The words were even more meaningful when I got pulled over for my second speeding ticket just two weeks later. Two speeding tickets in my first three months of driving. My parents had something to say about that as well.

To be charged with something is ominous but can you imagine when it is God that levies the charges? *I have a case against you!* Notice what God has Micah do next in,

Micah 6:3

*O my people, what have I done to you?
What have I done to make you tired of me?
Answer me!*

Instead of immediately jumping into accusing the Israelites with a whole series of failures as you might expect to happen in a lawsuit, God has Micah begin by asking the people two rhetorical questions.

*O my people, what have I done to you?
What have I done to make you tired of me?*

The way these questions are asked demonstrates God's deep love and tender care for his people rather than a hostile desire to put an end to their relationship.

In the 1960's Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Thomas Gordon developed the concept of an "I" statement. Has anyone ever heard of "I" statements? It is actually a strategy that we teach couples in pre-marriage counselling at North Park to improve their communication and conflict resolution skills. Using "I" statements in your communication with someone can enable you to

be assertive without making accusations and putting the listener on the defensive. They are way more effective than "you" statements which tend to shift the blame to the listener. Let me try this with you and tell me which statement would prompt you to want to engage in more discussion.

You never listen to me!

Or...

I feel like I haven't been heard. Can we talk more about that?

The first one kind of pushes you back in your chair and you want to get defensive, right? It puts all the blame on you and you legitimately want to defend yourself. In the second one, I am owning my feelings and inviting more communication because maybe there is something I am doing that is causing the communication roadblock. It actually causes you to move forward in your chair and engage more with me. Would you agree? Who would have thought that "I" statements actually had their origin long before Thomas Gordon and go back to God's word through the prophet Micah.

*O my people, what have I done to you?
What have I done to make you tired of me?*

Can we talk? "Where have I neglected our relationship?" God seems to be asking the Israelites. Of course, if the people cannot find any failure on God's part, then they will have to come to the possibility that they have fallen short in some way. *Answer me!* The questions end with a request for some response from the Israelites to explain where God has fallen short in his relationship with his people. But there is silence because they've got nothing.

That is frustrating isn't it? On that very odd occasion when Carolyn and I will have a disagreement and we have both shared our "I" statements. She may follow it up with, *tell me what I have done wrong* and I can't think of anything. It's frustrating because I realize that maybe this one was mostly about me and my shortcomings in this relationship.

Since there is no response given to accuse God of any failings in his covenant relationship with his people, He goes on to remind them of some of His great acts of love and grace towards His people throughout their history.

Micah 6:4-5

*For I brought you out of Egypt
and redeemed you from slavery.
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to help
you.
5 Don't you remember, my people,
how King Balak of Moab tried to have
you cursed
and how Balaam son of Beor blessed you
instead?
And remember your journey from Acacia
Grove to Gilgal,
when I, the LORD, did everything I could
to teach you about my faithfulness."*

I freed you from slavery. I gave you great leaders to guide you. I delivered the nation from a curse of Balak and I led you to a land, a promised land which I gave you. Like a skilled attorney, Micah is setting out God's case with precision. He calls the people to remember God's righteous deeds on their behalf and through this process, he is inviting them to evaluate for themselves; *Is the breakdown in the covenant they have with God, His fault? Or theirs?*

You want the truth? You can't handle the truth.

This gracious list of deeds for Israel not only demonstrate God's love and care for His people but also that He keeps His promises. He promised to love and provide for his people, and He does! The force of this opening argument by Micah confirms that the people of Israel have no basis for any complaining against God. He has not failed to uphold every aspect of the covenant He has made with His people.

I think that is a good exercise for all of us to do sometimes. Just stop, and remember. Remember the works of God in our life. Times when life was difficult and we were struggling a bit, maybe even crying out to God and questioning him, wondering where he was in the midst of it all. When we take time to reflect, we may realize that He was there, providing and caring for us in all sorts of ways.

Many of you know that Carolyn's dad died early last Sunday morning in Kitchener. She stayed with him Saturday night and into Sunday until he died. She then had to take care of some of the arrangements later that morning while she was still in Kitchener. One of those jobs was to go to the funeral home.

Unfortunately, I had to preach here last weekend, so I couldn't be with her. Her brothers who also live out of town, had to return to their homes. Carolyn was not looking forward to making the arrangements for her dad, alone. But, as she walked into the funeral home, she just prayed for God presence with her.

She was ushered into an office and just as the meeting started with the funeral director, there was a knock at the door. It was life-long friend of the family, like an uncle to her. That morning, he felt a prompt to come and sit with Carolyn and give his support. That was a life preserver for my wife, do you understand that? When she felt so overwhelmed, God provided in the form of a trusted family friend.

As we have had a chance to ponder the events of our past week, we have seen God's presence and provision in so many ways but we can miss it sometimes can't we? When we don't stop and take time to reflect. I encourage you to do that periodically as well and be encouraged that God is faithful in his relationship with us, just as he was with the Israelites during the time of Micah.

Back to the text. Sensing the force of his argument now, Micah almost imagines what the listeners must be thinking after hearing God's charges to them.

Have you seen the classic court room battles on TV or in the movies? One lawyer is grilling the person on the stand and all of a sudden, the other lawyer across the room, jumps up and yells out, *Objection!* That is essentially what happens next in the text. Micah just finishes listing the ways that God has been there for the people, strengthening his case against them. *God has freed you from slavery, given you good leaders, delivered you from a curse, led you to the Promised Land* and suddenly there is an, *Objection!!*

That's when Micah, now playing the role of the people's defender, voices what the Israelite must be thinking about the charges that have been levied against them. *Hold on. Yes, Lord, we know that you have done all of those things for us but, what do you want us to do?*

Micah 6:6-7

*What can we bring to the LORD?
Should we bring him burnt offerings?
Should we bow before God Most High
with offerings of yearling calves?
7 Should we offer him thousands of rams
and ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Should we sacrifice our firstborn children
to pay for our sins?*

The Israelites want to know, *Okay God, you have these charges against us. You don't think that we are living up to the terms of our covenant relationship with you. So, what do we need to do? What do we need to do?!*

Notice, these are rhetorical questions that match the rhetorical questions that God asked them earlier. The people try to defend themselves and protest their innocence by asking God similar questions. They want to know what they have done that God should find fault with them? They honestly don't know the basis for the charges for which they stand accused. This is how out of touch they were in their relationship with God. They thought all was well and everything was going smoothly.

I have seen this type of apathy affect marriages as well. One of the spouses is so preoccupied with other things. Maybe it is making a career, or they are just so immersed in the lives of the children or perhaps they are just emotionally absent from the marriage and one day their husband or wife sits them down and says, *you are not living up to your end of the marriage. Something has to change or we're done.* And they are surprised! They didn't see it coming. Their first response is to go on the defensive isn't it?

That is the posture of the Israelites here. *Objection. What more could we do? Should we bring more offerings to God? Or maybe more sacrifices? I got it, what if we offer him 1000's of rams or 10 000 rivers of Olive oil? Or, why don't we give him our first born?*

Would that satisfy him? Would that make him happy with us?! Would that demonstrate our obedience, reverence and generosity to God?

In their defensiveness, the people of God have missed the point. They have focused on the doing, on the excessive giving. What can we do? What can we give? As if God is primarily interested in the size or cost of the gift!

That does tend to be our default when it comes to pleasing people, isn't it? I will give you something or do something for you or write a cheque.

We tend to take that attitude into our relationship with God, too. To please God, we have to go to church every week or join a small group. Read the bible every day or recite the Lord's Prayer. Which in and of themselves aren't bad things but notice that the focus is on the do, do, do.

My wife is sad this week. Although her dad was sick for some time, the speed in which it all happened in the end, was shocking. She has now lost her mom and dad in a span of seven months. The role in which she has played her entire life, that of daughter, is now done. She is processing a lot and typical of a male, I just want to fix it. What can I do to take her pain away? Any other guys in here guilty of that?

All Carolyn wants and needs from me, is to just be. Be there for her. To listen to her as she processes her grief. To be attentive to her so that I will be able to determine what she needs and requires from our relationship at this time.

The exaggeration by the Israelites in the text; should we bring God, 1000's of rams, 10 000 rivers of Olive oil or our precious first born become absurd and reveal a fundamental problem. They don't understand what God requires of His people! They don't understand what He needs from them. This is where Micah gets to the climax of the case of: *Yahweh versus the People. Neglecting the Covenantal Relationship. Do you want to know what God requires of you?*, Micah seems to ask the Israelites *You want the truth? Are you sure you can handle the truth?!* He doesn't want more rams, more olive oil or even your first born child.

Micah 6:8

⁸ *No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

What does the Lord require of you? What is your role in the covenant relationship with All Mighty God? Do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly with God. It is important to understand here that Micah is not revealing some new standard of conduct on the people. He is not springing something on them that would have caught them completely off guard. These are attributes that are mentioned all throughout the Old Testament and they serve to remind us that God is much more interested in the quality of the person than the size or quantity of the gift they can bring to Him.

It is our character and our behaviour that matters most to God. He doesn't want any more platitudes and please, no more empty words. Just *do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly with God*. At the danger of thinking this is only an Old Testament requirement and when Jesus came on the scene, it nullified these words. No, no, no. These are still words to live by, but as Christians, we have the power of the Holy Spirit in us to help us to do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly.

So, what does that look like for us? Interesting, it looks the same for us, today as it did for the Israelite people in Micah's day.

1. *do what is right,*

This is all about justice. To do what is right is to be just. What does it mean to act for justice in our world today?

The quality of our relationship with God is reflected in the way we treat people.

In Micah's day, the people, particularly the leaders were bullies. They were confiscating other people's land and possessions, stealing from them and cheating them to enhance their own financial position. They were treating the less fortunate, inhumanely.

Look around our world today. Read the headlines. How are we treating each other?

As followers of Jesus, as disciples of the Living God, we are to lead the way in promoting justice in our world and it starts with how we treat each other. How we treat our family members, fellow Christians, neighbours, foreigners, immigrants, the poor, the addicted, the orphans and the widows.

Acting for justice abhors violent acts of physical abuse against anyone or any kind of behaviour that attempts to take something that rightfully belongs to another.

The Israelites in Micah's day were neglecting this part of their relationship with God and He is holding them accountable for it.

God demonstrates justice to us and we are to demonstrate it to others. Are we *doing what is right*?

The second requirement is:

2. *to love mercy,*

"Love mercy" contains the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means "loyal love" or "loving-kindness." Along with justice, God calls the Israelite people to provide mercy. Both justice and mercy are foundational to God's character.

God expected his people to show love and compassion to others and to be loyal in their love toward Him, just as He had been loyal to them.

Mercy also implies this idea of forgiveness. To give someone the opposite of what their actions may deserve. How do we respond when people wrong us even if we are justified in seeking retribution? Mercy doesn't ignore the wrong. Recognizing the violation is important for mercy and forgiveness to be extended.

God definitely demonstrated mercy in his relationship to his people, Jesus is a big part of that but God wants the same mercy He

abundantly gives to us to show up in our interactions with others.

As followers of Jesus, do we love mercy?

The third requirement:

3. *walk humbly with your God.*

“Walk humbly” is a description of the heart’s attitude toward God. God’s people depend on Him rather than their own abilities. This phrase has also been translated to “walk circumspectly” which I really like. It means to be attentive, careful and prudent to follow God’s will for our life instead of our own.

It means turning away from things that put the focus primarily on ourselves and our own accomplishments and instead acknowledge that God is the author of our lives and He is the one that directs our path each day.

In that wonderful passage in Philippians 2, it tells us that Christ humble himself, came to earth, became a slave and died a criminal’s death for us, to save us. God’s requirement of us is to emulate and follow Jesus and walk humbly with him.

Have you ever wondered what God requires of you, us? There you have it.

No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,

and this is what he requires of you:

to do what is right, to love mercy,

and to walk humbly with your God.

The problem in Micah is that the people were not living up to their end of the covenant relationship with God. They were not doing what was right, loving mercy and walking humbly with God and He is not pleased. He levels a divine lawsuit against them and if we were to read on in Micah 6, we would see that he brings down his verdict, **GUILTY!!**

The punishment? The sentence that awaits God’s people? They will face ruin because of their sin and neglect of their heavenly Father. But as I said earlier, divine judgement is not God’s last word

through his prophets. There is hope. A new day is dawning.

Due to his great justice, mercy, love and compassion, God sent his son, Jesus for the sins of humanity. He has set us free. He has sprung us from our imprisonment. It is when we humble ourselves and with repentant hearts receive Jesus, that the power of the Holy Spirit lives in us and gives us the strength and power to live the way He requires of us. That is:

*to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Amen? Amen.

Points to Ponder

Majoring on the Minors ~ Micah 6:1-8

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. If someone asked you as a child, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” How did you respond? Why? How close does what you actually do come to what you dreamed as a child?
2. Have you ever faced a lawsuit? Have you ever been charged with anything? If you feel comfortable sharing, describe the feelings you had during that experience. How do you feel about God laying out His grievances towards His people in the form of a lawsuit?
3. Take some time to share with each other the ways that you have seen God present and at work in your life during some pretty difficult situations. How does this reveal that God is faithful in His relationship to you?
4. Before this message, what did you believe that God required from you? What did you think you needed to do to please God?
5. Take some time to discuss what it means for you, as a follower of Jesus to:
 - a) *do what is right*
 - b) *love mercy*
 - c) *walk humbly with God.*

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray specifically for what it means for you to do what the Lord requires of you. That is; to do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly with God.