

What shall I do?

Micah 6:6-8

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In 2 Chronicles 28:19 we read these words, “The Lord had humbled Judah because of Ahaz King of Israel, for he had promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the Lord.”

There is corruption at every level of society. The judges, the prophets, and the priests had all become corrupt. The rich were oppressing the poor to the point of confiscating their land, something that was strictly forbidden by Mosaic Law. In addition, there is war and skirmishes with every neighboring country. It is during this time that the prophet Micah is called to his prophetic ministry.

His message is a harsh one. It is simply this. You have sinned and judgment is coming. There is the worst sin at every level of society. There is bribery by the judges, prophets and even the priests. The rich care only for themselves and oppress the weak and poor without care. Jerusalem, the capital city of God’s people, you have become the very worst of the sin of Jacob and you will be utterly destroyed. Your land will be taken over by foreigners and you will weep and wail as you watch your children taken into captivity. You yourselves will go stripped and naked into exile.

This was Micah’s word from the Lord. Their religion had become nothing more than rote words and actions. There was no genuineness in their worship. Even though the religious leaders would say the Lord is in our midst, it would make no difference. They were words of hypocrisy. There was no escaping what the Lord had decreed. This is the overall message of the first 5 chapters of the book of Micah.

Turn now with me to chapter six of Micah. To begin I want to read verses 3 to 5. Once again Micah proclaims the Lord has a charge against His people. Then you can hear the saddened voice of the Lord through Micah, “My people, what have I done to you? How have I become a burden to you? Answer me.” The Lord God is speaking to his people with great sorrow. Why have you turned away from me, how have I made life difficult for you? Why do you forsake me? Judgment for sin is not what He desires and yet justice and holiness demand it.

The Lord then exhorts the people to remember His righteous acts and how he made them his people; how he delivered them from slavery in Egypt and protected them from their enemies on their journey. He tells them to remember all that happened from Shittim to Gilgal. Shittim was where Israel camped before crossing the Jordan River to enter the land the Lord had given them. Gilgal was where they camped after crossing the river. What happened between Shittim and Gilgal? First, the Lord separated the water of the Jordan as he had done at the Red Sea and they crossed the river on dry ground. At Gilgal they set up memorial stones taken from the river bed to remember how they had crossed the Jordan with a miracle. It was at Gilgal they

celebrated the Passover for the first time in the Promised Land and all the Jewish males were circumcised at Gilgal to show they were part of the covenant God had made with them.

This is God's word to the people through Micah, remember!! Remember my righteous acts and how I made you my people.

Most likely Micah delivered this message while the city of Jerusalem was under siege from the Assyrian army while Hezekiah was king in Judah. The army of Assyria was literally at the gates of Jerusalem. Micah is prophesying you have sinned greatly before the Lord and judgment is coming. But even now, remember who you are, remember and turn back to God.

And now in verse 6 Micah's vantage point changes from declaring the message of God, to declaring what is taking place in the heart of those who heard. And he now speaks these emotionally tense and spiritually rich words. Verses 6 and 7.

How can we turn back to God now? Our sin is so great. What can we do? Can burnt offerings satisfy Him? What if I offered a thousand rams with ten thousand rivers of oil, would that atone for my sin? Would God be pleased? What could possibly be enough? Should I offer my first-born child, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? What could be enough? The thought of what needed to be offered was so extreme because the sin was so extreme, and the threat of destruction was so very real and near.

These words are not just the story of the Jewish people during Micah's time. It's our story as well. It's your story and my story. It's everyone's story; the reality of sin. How it has separated us from God and brought destruction right at the gate of our lives. When you and I actually see our hopeless situation, when we see our own sinfulness and the consequences of that sin all around us, at that point we know instinctively something extreme must be done. When things get bad, really bad, people cry out like the words of verses 6 and 7. **What can I do? But when we cry out that way, we are asking what we can do to get God to change, to get him to make it all better. However, the reality is; it is not God who must change, but we who must change.**

And because this is true Micah speaks nothing about religion. He says nothing about making offerings of any kind. He says nothing about going to church or worshiping or even praying. The things that many people think they should do to get God to change things. But what does he say? Listen to verse 8. Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. This is what the Lord requires of YOU.

What Lord requires:

1. Do justice.

So the first directive Micah gives is to act justly. Treat others fairly. God's desire is that we are just, fair in our actions with others. This is how God desires his people to live. Think about this fact for a moment. In the book of Exodus chapter 20, Israel, the ethnic people descended from

Jacob, when they were nothing more than freed slaves; they were taught by God how to live before they were taught how to worship. The Ten Commandments are all about how to treat other people. This is what God taught them, long before he taught them how to worship. And that has been God's message to mankind ever since.

Acts of worship to God are nothing but hypocrisy if we don't live justly. Isn't that the very thing Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount? Isn't it why he berated the Pharisees and called them hypocrites? Listen to Jesus in Matthew chapter 23. He is taking the Pharisees to task, and in verse 23 he says, "you hypocrites, you give a tenth of your spices (a religious offering). But you have neglected the more **important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness.**" The more important matters!

Rarely do the Old Testament prophets speak against wrong ceremonial worship, but always against sinful, selfish living; mistreating others, especially the weak. I once heard someone say the following: "I know God put me on earth to care for others. But what one earth are the others here for?" While that sounds humorous, it cunningly shows how selfish all of us can be.

The Hebrew word for justice implies that we are to see others as partners in relationship. When we see others as God sees them, we will look on others as partners in this thing we call humanity. I know we hear a lot about social justice today. But I would like to suggest for our purposes this morning, let's apply the directive **to do justice very personally**. For just a moment let's not think about the injustice of government and organizations of crime. Let's understand that God's heart for each of us is that we simply treat everyone we deal with fairly. Let it be said by everyone that born-again Christians are the most just, the fairest people of all. In every relationship, whether we are an employee or an employer, whether we are the buyer or the seller, the neighbor, the co-worker or any other relationship you can think of, let it be said that we are the most just of all people.

2. Love mercy.

When one reads the book of Psalms carefully you notice that mercy or lovingkindness is the emphasized attribute of God. In Psalm 136 for example the phrase "His lovingkindness is everlasting" is repeated 26 times, once in each verse. Each verse declares an act of God and is followed by His mercy / lovingkindness endures forever. Some translations read love others mercy and some others lovingkindness. The reason for this is that the Hebrew word being translated is *cheded*. It is a difficult word to translate because it carries all the meanings of kindness, mercy, steadfast love and faithfulness. It is found first in Genesis and throughout the Old Testament, over 50 times in the Psalms alone.

Cheded is so foundational to understanding God's dealings with man that Bible scholars say that *cheded* is the force that guarantees the covenant God made with Israel. It is what makes the covenant solid and durable. God's mercy, his love, his kindness, and his faithfulness, *cheded*; is the force that guarantees his covenant. Scholars also say that *cheded* is never a feeling, but almost always associated with the verb to do. *Cheded* is something you do!

What more profound way could God have shown his checed for us than in Jesus at the cross? There at Golgotha was God's mercy, love, kindness and faithfulness to the human race on full display. It was so much more than a feeling it was an action. Jesus said the New Covenant is in his blood. The force that guarantees the New Covenant is also checed, the mercy and faithfulness of God demonstrated in the person and sacrifice of Jesus.

Micah uses this word when he tells us what God requires, to love mercy. Notice with me that Micah says not simply to show mercy, but to love mercy. We as the people of God, bought with the mercy of God, are to love showing mercy. We are to love demonstrating the lovingkindness of God. When we love showing mercy we are acting as God acts. We are imitating God. Remember what Jesus said about this very thing? He said we are to love our enemies and in doing so, "you will be sons of the most high for he himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." Remember the parable he told about the servant who had been shown mercy and forgiven a huge debt, and the King expected that the servant would show the same kind of mercy. And when he didn't the King was outraged.

Turn to the New Testament with me and the book of Ephesians. Listen to these words from chapter 4:32 through chapter 5:2. Paul instructs us to be kind and compassionate and to forgive just as we are forgiven in Christ. He then says to be imitators of God. How do we do that? Live a life of love as Jesus loved us and gave himself up for us. It is the checed of God in Jesus at the cross that saves us. Now we are to love demonstrating that same sacrificial love, mercy, and kindness to others. This is what God requires.

3. Walk humbly with God.

At times we can become confused about what humility is. We think it is denying that we have abilities or talents, or saying our talents are nothing. That is not humility. That is false humility. To be humble don't do anything. Simply be who and what you are, who God has made you. **Genuine humility happens when we are focused on God and not ourselves.** False humility and pride happen when we are focused on what we think others think about us. As I said, to walk humbly focus on God. When we truly see him as he is in all his glory, all pride and worry about ourselves vanish.

I want to quickly consider two New Testament passages which emphasize walking with God in humility. The first is Ephesians 4:1-3. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received, Paul tells us. Be completely humble and gentle, patient with one another in love. All of us who have believed on Jesus have received a calling from God and we are to live our lives worthy of that calling which includes humility. What is important to see is humility is tied to our calling. Our calling is to follow a risen living Lord, to walk with Him. When we are truly walking with Him we will be living in humility.

The second passage is Philippians chapter 2:1-3. When we yield to the Holy Spirit living in us we reflect the very nature of Jesus. The very nature of Jesus was giving himself for the healing and

life of others. So Paul says do nothing from selfish ambition. There is nothing more opposite to the Spirit of Jesus than selfish ambition, the desire to please self at the expense of others. But in humility consider others better than yourself. That is to say, **consider others of more value than your selfish desires**. What is important to understand is that Paul begins this section by referring to being united with Christ. Being united with Jesus is how we live in humility.

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? I've seen my sin and the destruction it has caused all around me. What offering can I possibly give to pay for all my sin and guiltiness? Should I offer my firstborn for my sin, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Is there anything I can give to atone for my sin?

God's response says nothing about bringing any offering. He has provided the offering, his only Son. Then what he desires, indeed, what he requires is that we be conformed to his likeness. Jesus did justice, Jesus loved mercy and Jesus walked in humility. Now, give Jesus Christ full control of your life that you can do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.