

Our sermon text this week is from the book of Micah, chapter 6, verses 1-8. Give ear to the work of the LORD

Hear now what the LORD says:

“Arise, plead your case before the mountains, And let the hills hear your voice. Hear, O you mountains, the LORD’s complaint, And you strong foundations of the earth; For the LORD has a complaint against His people, And He will contend with Israel.

“O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me.

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage;

And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O My people, remember now

What Balak king of Moab counseled, And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,

From Acacia Grove to Gilgal, That you may know the righteousness of the LORD.”

With what shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before

Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,

Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what *is* good;

And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy,

And to walk humbly with your God?

Let us pray

Oh, great and merciful Father, we thank you for your word; that it is living and active, and that we may study it and be changed by it. We know your word is here for us to be refreshed and rejuvenated; and cleansed and cleaned; and also to be instructed and convicted of our own sin. Help us this morning to understand all that you need us to hear, and bring us true, heartfelt understanding, for we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning we are going to begin a two week break out of the book of Daniel and talk about the Sixth chapter of the book Micah. Years ago I was given a book by George Grant titled "The Micah Mandate: Balancing the Christian Life." It is a great book, primarily designed to help bring into focus how to apply the precepts of Chapter 6,verse 8 "to do Justly, to Love mercy, and Walk humbly with our God." And we will talk a little bit about this "Mandate" today, but I primarily want to focus this mornings message on the first 7 verses of chapter 6, and deal with verse 8 next week. My goal for this morning is to give some color around the time and occasion, to exposit to the best of my ability the first 7 verses, and then some practical application on them. So, Here we go...

To start off today, I think a bit of historical context is helpful to the understanding of this message. Micah prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah from the time just before the fall of Samaria, the capital of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians, through the time of King Hezekiah of Judah; from roughly 750BC to 725BC. Micah may have seen the destruction of Israel by Assyria in 722 BC, and he probably also witnessed the Lord's dramatic rescue of Jerusalem from the Assyrians during Hezekiah's reign. Micah was active in his ministry at the same time as the prophet Isaiah, and his ministry ended about 125

years before the Babylonian invasion we have been discussing in the book of Daniel. So now that we have an idea about time and place, lets discuss the Jewish culture of the time.

Any cursory skimming of both books of the Kings and both books of the Chronicles of the Kings show an endless cycle of “And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, except” and he did Evil in the sight of the Lord...” And this is where we see Micah coming on to the scene. From 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, chapter 15, verses 1-4

*In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king. He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.*

Verses 17-20

*In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi became king over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control. And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17

*In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money.*

*Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.*

*For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger, for they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."*

Micah is writing to bring God's "lawsuit" against his people. He indicts Israel and Jerusalem for their sins; with both Assyria and Babylon standing at the door to carry out God's judgment. The

reigns of king Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, along with the increasing threat of Assyria, provide the broad background for Micah's writings. And the book of Micah lists specific sins of both the northern and southern kingdoms. These sins include idolatry, the unlawful seizure of property, the failures of not only the civil leadership, but of the religious and prophetic leadership of the day. The people were offering sacrifice without truly repenting of their sins; and corrupt business practices and violence was rampant. This was one of those "low" times in the faithfulness of God's chosen people, and this is where we are introduced to Micah.

While we don't know a lot about the prophet Micah, we do know the justice issues he faced during the eighth century B.C. were not unlike some of the issues we face today. Micah lived in the land of Judah during a time of wealth and prosperity. On the outside it may have appeared that God's people were thriving, but on the inside, they were rotting to the core. Political corruption was pervasive. Economic exploitation was rampant, sin was rampant and on full display, and the enemies of God were right on the doorstep. The nation had drifted so far from God they could no longer tell the difference between good and evil. Even though they were going through the outward motions of worship, their hearts were far from the Lord. Much like America today, their society was characterized by overconfidence, self-indulgence and self-importance. Unbridled greed and arrogance made those in power callous to meting out justice fairly and evenly, and The words and worship of the rulers, as well as the common people were hollow and empty.

So, Micah blew the whistle on this blatant hypocrisy by announcing God's ensuing judgment on His people unless they repented from their sin. His whistle blowing prophecy blends a harsh message of judgment with the hope of future restoration at the coming of the

Messiah. Through it all, Micah pleads with his people to come back to the Lord. And, today's text forms the climax of his prophetic message. He reminds the people that God is not interested in hollow sacrifices or empty acts of worship and he sums everything up in verse 8 saying, *"Israel would please God by simply acting justly, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God."*

*Hear now what the LORD says: "Arise, plead your case before the mountains, And let the hills hear your voice. Hear, O you mountains, the LORD's complaint, And you strong foundations of the earth; For the LORD has a complaint against His people, And He will contend with Israel. "O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O My people, remember now What Balak king of Moab counseled, And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, From Acacia Grove to Gilgal, That you may know the righteousness of the LORD."*

*With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God?*

*Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old?*

*Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil?*

*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

*He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah speaks to begin the passage, calling the people, and all creation to listen to the LORD as He presents his case against Israel. He calls the hills, the mountains, and then the very foundations of the earth to listen to God present His case. This idea of calling all creation to listen is used in other areas of the Old Testament, most notably in Deuteronomy 32:1: *“Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; Let the earth hear the words I utter!”* and in Isaiah 1:2a *“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, For the Lord has spoken.”* The mountains and the hills are the everlasting foundations of the earth and they are called to be witnesses of what has happened to the relationship between God and His people. They have been around longer than the Israelites and have witnessed the Lord’s faithfulness and Israel’s rebellion. This seems to heighten the drama and intensify the sarcasm that is apparent in this passage.

The form of this introductory passage is a classic “covenant lawsuit” against the people of Israel. The scene is set “in a court of cosmic dimensions.” This passage sets God up as both prosecutor and judge, with Israel as the defendant.

In verse 3, God invites the people to reason with Him, to judge whether God has been good to them. We see this same tactic used in Isaiah 5:3: *“Now, then, dwellers of Jerusalem and men of Judah, you be the judges between me and my vineyard.”*

God does not directly come out in this passage and charge Israel with any crimes or sins or breaking of covenant. Instead, God invites Israel into dialogue. God asks Israel what their grievances are against God; God asks Israel if God has “wearied” them. Instead of “wearying” Israel, God has redeemed the people repeatedly. God goes on in the next two verses to remind the people of His saving acts.

*For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
I redeemed you from the house of bondage;  
And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.  
O My people, remember now  
What Balak king of Moab counseled,  
And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,  
From Acacia Grove to Gilgal,  
That you may know the righteousness of the LORD.”*

In these verses God reminds the people of his saving acts from the Exodus to their entry into the Promised Land. Each of these stories would be familiar to Micah’s readers. The delivery from Egypt was a pivotal point in the life of the people. It is their most cherished story of God’s saving grace. It makes sense to recall this most important act of God as first in God’s list of what he has done for his people.

God goes on to remind the people of Balak king of Moab and his plot against Israel. Numbers 22-24 recounts the story of Balak who called on Balaam, son of Beor, to curse the Israelites. Balaam was a prophet of sorts, and a non-Jew who “possessed some knowledge of Jehovah and he acknowledged that his knowledge as a prophet came from God.” Balak sends messengers to fetch Balaam, but Balaam does not trust them. He consults with God who forbids him to go to Balak. Later the king sends several high officials to seek out Balaam. They appeal to his pride and offer him honors and a great reward if he comes to Balak’s aid. Balaam still insists on

speaking with God before he agrees go. God grants permission to Balaam to go with the men, but on the condition that “whatever I command you, that you shall do.”

Balaam leaves the next morning with the men but “God was incensed at him going.” An angel of the LORD appears on the road to Moab, but Balaam does not see it. Balaam’s donkey, however, does see the angel who tries to stop Balaam’s progress three times. Each time the donkey shies away from the road, then in Numbers 22:28, the donkey asks why Balaam is beating it. Finally, Balaam’s eyes are opened and he sees the angel. Balaam offers to turn back, but the angel tells him to go on to Moab, but repeats the warning that “you must say nothing except what I tell you.” Balaam informs Balak that he can only speak the words of the LORD. He builds seven altars where a ram and a bullock are offered as sacrifices. At the altar, Balaam tries to do Balak’s bidding and to speak a curse against Israel. Balaam tries to curse Israel three times, but each time, instead of a curse, Balaam blesses the Israelites saying “blessed are they who bless you, accursed they who curse you!”

In these verses, God offers this example as one of God’s saving acts for Israel. Even an enemy of Israel cannot speak a curse against the people because of God’s actions. Interestingly though, it is Balaam who gives Balak the key to make the Israelites stumble just before their entrance into the Promised Land. While they were in Shittim, the Israelites “began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.” While Balaam could not curse the Israelites in the way that Balak had wished, he did provide Balak with a way to corrupt the people just the same. Only God’s saving act of preventing Balaam’s curse is what is important to our passage, and Micah emphasizes that while God can prevent others from cursing the Israelites, God will not prevent the Israelites

from cursing themselves. After Balaam's efforts to curse the Israelites fails, God leads them from Shittim on the east of Jordan to Gilgal on the west where they finally enter the Promised Land.

And then we see a transition in the text as we see Israel's answers to God; and it is done with parallel language "*With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God?*" is the first response as the people wonder what they can bring to God. "Shall I approach with burnt offerings," is a general question, but becomes much more specific in the parallel line "with calves a year old?" The third parallel is v.7b in discussing the matter of child sacrifice, of giving "my first born for my transgression" and the parallel of, "The fruit of my body for my sins?" In this passage the people address God after God's case against Israel has been made. The people ask the LORD as to what it is the LORD wants from them. They go on to list the many sacrifices they've engaged in before God. The offerings are considered from the smallest possible offering to the most expensive, from burnt offerings to child sacrifice.

Burnt offerings, and guidelines for offering them, are outlined in Leviticus 1:1-17. These sacrifices are completely destroyed by fire. None of the meat is left over for food for the priests. Calves a year old are more valuable, and were offered for a priest. "This offering would have been made by the wealthy." Cereal offerings were provided with oil. To offer "thousands of rams with myriads of streams of oil" would be a lavish sacrifice. Offering a first born son would

be the most valuable sacrifice a person could give to God. Child sacrifice is condemned in Mosaic Law but was not unheard of in Israel. 2 Kings 16:3 relates that King Ahaz had sacrificed his first born son, as did King Manassah in 2 Kings 21:6. The Jews also offered child sacrifices in the valley of Hinnom in Jeremiah 19:5 and Jeremiah 32:35 in worship to Baal and Molech.

Its important to note that not all commentaries agree that this passage is literally talking about child sacrifice. Some believe this passage refers more specifically to the rights enjoyed by the first born. That of “a special blessing and a double share of his father’s property.” Since the passage deals with “worthy gifts,” some commentaries consider the mention of child sacrifice to point to “the explicit consideration of a human life totally dedicated to God ... ”

That explanation I think paints too pretty of a picture of what the people are asking here. The passage is toned so that it seems to reflect the people’s growing frustration with God. God has outlined a case against them and they seem taken aback that they have done anything to upset God. Instead, they plead, “Look at what we’ve done. We’ve given every offering in the book, and even some that are explicitly outlawed in the book. What more can we give?”

The rhetorical point that the prophet makes by laying out the sacrifices from least to most is that sacrifice cannot be an empty gesture. Even the most lavish of sacrifices means nothing to God if the person’s heart and mind are not fixed on God at all times.

And the Israelites that are being addressed here are us.... How many times are we given every blessing and every grace, yet still grumble and moan about our situation. How often do we see the thousands of chances we have been given to do what “is right in the sight of the LORD” and it's still not enough to keep us from walking down the wrong path. We should look at these

verses we have been discussing today and see ourselves. We are the Israelites, except we have the fortune of living on this side of the cross.

We see the endless cycles of faithfulness and unfaithfulness in the Israelites and it seems as if they are the dumbest people around; how can they forget all that God has done for them? But we often fail to remember ourselves that they were still awaiting the Messiah and had not seen the fulfilment of that promise; they looked forward to the Christ, but thought of the coming Messiah as a political ruler, someone who would conquer their enemies and be the Earthly ruler of nations. We mustn't forget that even though they seem hard headed and stiff necked, they had been looking ahead for the Messiah for hundreds of years, and they really didn't understand the fullness of what they were hoping for.

We have the great pleasure of living on this side of the Cross. We have seen the fulfillment of ALL of God's promises in the personhood of Jesus Christ. We have a ruler who has conquered every enemy, even death. We have an advocate with the Father in Christ that is the One true sacrifice for all of our sins. We have been reconciled to God....And we are still like the Israelites, grumbling and complaining and going through our own individual cycles of varying degrees of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. We have been given everything, yet these verses could have easily been personally directed at each one of us.

And that is the main point I was hoping to make this morning. We can look at the ancient Israelites and see their failings, but we too often fail to see how we can be EXACTLY like them; all of the same leanings and temptations; have all the same issues that they had, and often fail where they failed. But the most poignant verse, the most hopeful verse in this section is verse 8. This is God's answer to what the Israelites, what we, are to do to when engaging with the

marvelous creation God has given us. Next week we will open these verses up more fully, but its important to meditate on them throughout the week, and pray that God will show us our own failings, and by the Holy Spirit, help us to see that this is what God requires of us.

*He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*

Let us pray