

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.

Last week we looked at these verses and I spent most of the time expositing the first 7, and for the most part left out verse 8. This week we are going to do the exact opposite; we will briefly recap the first 7 verses; the time and occasion they were written in, and a short exposition. But we will spend the bulk of our time this morning discussing verse 8, which is the crux of what may have termed as the “Micah Mandate.”

So last week we discussed when the book of Micah was written, between 750 and 725 BC. It was not a great time to be an Israelite; both the Assyrians and the Babylonians were an aggressive enemy force that were ever threatening the safety and security of the Israelites. There was rampant corruption with the Kings and the priests, and the common people were living an outwardly decent life; but the spiritual state was a disaster... and while we don't know a lot about the prophet Micah's personal life or upbringing, we do know the justice issues he faced during the eighth century B.C. were not unlike some of the issues we face today. On the outside it appeared that God's people were thriving, but on the inside, they were rotting to the core. 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. The words and worship of the rulers, as well as the people were hollow and empty.

God's response, through Micah, was to chasten them. We looked at the first 5 verses as God's calling of all of creation to his court of Justice; and how God, although he doesn't directly indict them in these verses, how God sets the stage and reminds them of all he has done for them. He reminds them of the Exodus out of Egypt and out of their captivity; and he reminds them of the blessings that He bestows on them through Moses, Aaron and Miriam. This was one of the most treasured events in all of Jewish history; an event that was told from generation to generation. Everyone would know this story, and of Gods great goodness. From Exodus 14, starting in verse 9

So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.

This is a fairly lengthy reading, and it is a story that we all know and have read multiple times; I added it today to illustrate something very important. Its good for us, and it was important for the Israelites as well, to be reminded of what God has done. It is also very easy for us to take these well know stories for granted at times; be truthful now, how many of you started to tune out about half way through the reading? I'm going to caution each one of us, that we must NEVER tire of hearing the word of God proclaimed; this is one of the things that has plagued the people of God forever and leads us down the same path that we see the Israelites in the time of Micah. This story is so familiar to us, and was so familiar to the Jews of the 8th century, that we often fail to see and to reflect on just how miraculous this event was in the history of God's people. Micah reminded his people of their failing to keep this Historical miracle top of mind, and now I have reminded you as well.

Getting back to our text, we come to the story of Balaam and Balak, and how God is using any means, even an "unbeliever" to bless his people. When Balak is wanting Balaam to curse the Israelites to defeat them in battle, He sends an angel of the Lord to block his path. We recounted much of that story last week, but hear Numbers 24, verses 1-7

Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness. 2And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

Then he took up his oracle and said: "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, The utterance of him who hears the words of God, Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Who falls down, with eyes wide open: "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, Like gardens by the riverside, Like aloes planted by the LORD, Like cedars beside the waters. He shall pour water from his buckets, And his seed shall be in many waters. "His king shall be higher than Agag, And his kingdom shall be exalted.

This is what Micah is reminding the people of, of God's mighty and gracious hand that He has spread out to the Israelites. And what was their response,

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?

Their response, and the obvious cynicism behind it, clearly goes to show that they don't want to, nor do we usually want to if we are being honest, recognize our insignificance when it is measured against God's mighty standing. They, we, don't want to remember how God has dealt with us gently and blessed us graciously; it always takes away from our own power. It is much easier to follow some hollow and empty ritual to "look like" we are being holy. It's easier to say some magic words or make some sacrifice to gain our standing with God. "If only we say this thing perfectly and do that thing the way it's prescribed, God doesn't really care where our heart is...we did what we were told, and even some of the things we were not told....What more do you want?"

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?

RC Sproul writes,

But no sinner can purchase the Lord's covenant love and protection. Micah reminds the people that God requires justice, kindness, and a humble walk with Him from those who call Him their Savior. This does not mean Micah sees the sacrifices as dispensable as long as these ethical requirements are kept. Instead, the prophet means that all the sacrifices in the world will get us nowhere if we do not have the sincere faith that bears fruit in love of God and neighbor. The Lord's covenant is not a tit-for-tat relationship or commercial exchange wherein we negotiate a price and He delivers in return. His covenant of salvation with sinners is a relationship grounded in His effectual love that changes our hearts and guarantees our loyalty to Him.

Hear what Paul says in Ephesians 2, verses 8-13

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

So how were the ancient Israelites of the 8th century, and how are we, to live up to this lofty mandate that Micah has given? We know from the historical records that Israel was not repentant of their wickedness, and they were eventually judged by God, and carried away into captivity by both the Assyrians and then the Babylonians. For them as well as for us, it is a Heart issue, and they failed miserably; but unlike the Israelites we have the gift of looking back to the example that was given to us through the example of Christ in His earthly ministry; and the command to “do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God” can be exemplified by the person and works of Jesus Christ; and one of the clearest examples of how to do justly and love mercy is through the story of the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4.

So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."
Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

We see in this example how to be just and merciful simultaneously. We need to remember the culture of the time; it would have probably been more acceptable for Jesus to have shared a meal with a leper than to have this exchange with the Samaritan woman. No self-respecting Jew would have any dealings with the Samaritans, let alone a woman, and a promiscuous one at that. We see in His dealings with her how to be merciful. She is an untouchable, someone who He should not have been near, yet He treats her as a person. Someone who God created in His image and is worthy of respect. Yet He also deals justly with her. She is in sin, active and seemingly unrepentant adultery, and He deals with that. He lets her know, that He knows, that she is in sin; and now she must deal with it, especially when staring into the eyes of the confirmed Messiah.

So, what does that look like? How are we to act justly? We usually think of this word in a sense of civil matters, and that isn't necessarily wrong, but not all of us have the ability or the authority to serve as the hand of justice. But for each of us, to act justly means we are to do what is right and truthful according to the word of God; And that justice is seen in the personhood of Christ. How do we deal with the obnoxious coworker, the irritable neighbor, the little blessing that wont stop pulling on your pant leg or get their Math done? We look to the scriptures and look at Christ.

Mercy is similar. When we look at the Godhead, we see mercy everywhere. And the practical application is found in Luke 6

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.
"But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Its an old and clichéd slogan, but it is genuinely appropriate when we are looking in this context; What Would Jesus DO? We can read the scriptures and see how Jesus would handle our situations; we can extrapolate from what we know of Him, and we are called to emulate Him. Christ is the embodiment of acting justly and loving mercy.

These first two requirements emphasize our relationship with other people, our horizontal relationships with our neighbors. But, the third desire of God found in the Micah Mandate focuses on our relationship with God. To walk humbly with God is to live in awe of Him, in a close knit relationship with Him, and live a life that is honoring to Him.

And a very helpful way to do this, to walk humbly with God, is to look at what he has done for us.

John 3:13

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

And Romans 5:6-11

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 1For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 1And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Think about this for a min.....and hear from 2 Corinthians 5

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This is what God has done for us, And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

Let us never be people who forget this.

Let us pray

Oh great Father, whose very nature is justice and mercy, we thank you for the precious gift of your word and the time that you have given us to study it today. Let us be a people who emulate your beloved Son and let us be a people who show the world your great goodness and mercy. Help us, by your spirit, to hold up your statutes and live a truly God honoring life; for we as in Jesus name. Amen