

Micah 6:1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Luke 6:17-27, 31 (New Revised Standard Version)

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Most scholars believe that the Gospel of Luke was written  
about 50 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus,  
and was addressed primarily to early Christians under attack.

We know that it was a time of harshly cruel and intense persecution.

Many were being arrested, beaten, tortured and even slaughtered,  
and many were **trying to stamp out and crush Christianity.**

**It was a very difficult time to be a Christian.**

**Luke's faith community of besieged & suffering Christians  
was feeling discouraged by severe & endless persecution.**

With so much difficulty, struggle and suffering, they wondered  
are we really traveling on the right track or has God abandoned us?

**Surely to live as a Christian shouldn't be this hard.**

And trying to respond and answer those concerns, Luke writes

to remind them about the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus.

Jesus had been opposed, rejected and eventually killed by  
the same folks who were now persecuting Luke's community.

Luke's message was, take heart amid your struggles and sufferings,  
for you are in good company, vs. 20-22, he looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Several of the newer translations use the word, 'happy or fortunate,'  
but that fails to convey the full depth of what's meant -- by blessed.

Blessed is the idea of being within God's purpose and intention,  
to be at peace with the Lord for having made the right godly choices.  
It's to be on track and traveling the path that God intends,  
and it's when your life is in tune -- in harmony with God.

In this passage Jesus is turning the world's standards upside down,  
and it insists that things are different under the reign of God,  
when we let God's grace, love & blessings guide & inform  
how we choose to live, to respond and perceive our world.

### **His message was to look well past and beyond your present situation.**

The late Ray Stedman used to tell an insightful story about this.

There was an old and retiring missionary couple aboard a ship  
who were coming home after a lifetime of service in Africa.  
They were old & weary, in poor health, few friends,  
with no pension & facing a very difficult future.

As it happened, Pres. Teddy Roosevelt was also on that same ship.  
He was coming back from an expensive big game safari in Africa,  
and of course everyone was making a big deal of it.

The contrast got to be a bit much for this discouraged missionary.  
"Something is wrong. Why should we, who have given our lives  
in service for God in Africa after all these many years,  
have no one care a thing about us?  
Here this man comes back from a hunting trip  
and everyone makes over him, but nobody even notices us."

Then, at the dock, a band began playing to greet the president,  
the mayor and other important people made speeches,  
and reports filled the papers with news of the event.

BUT the missionary couple slipped off the ship unnoticed.  
That night,  
in a cheap little apartment, the man's spirit finally broke.  
"I can't take it", he said. "God isn't treating us right."

He went alone into the bedroom and in prayer he told God how he felt.  
When he came out, his wife could see that something was different.

When she asked him about it, he answered,  
"I told the Lord how bitter I was that the President  
should receive all that tremendous homecoming,  
when no one even met us when we returned home.

When I finished it felt and seemed as if God put his arm around me  
and simply said, **"But you know, you're not home yet."**

The Beatitudes are not Jesus giving us advice or instruction  
about how to get along well or how to succeed in this world,  
for he had in mind a much larger & lasting purpose than that.

Some folks teach that the Beatitudes should be seen and interpreted  
as a road map to social progress -- directions for us to follow,  
**and how by our own efforts, by our good deeds and development,  
we can change our world for the better, make heaven on earth.**

The Beatitudes then become ethical teachings to cure social ills,  
new commandments to make our world a better place to in which live.

But if you read through the Beatitudes and consider them carefully,  
the focus is not so much about specific actions and our behavior,  
as **they are about internal values** that are to guide what we do.

Our conduct is fruit of our character as a reflection of our heart.

Our walk with Jesus produces character which produces our conduct.  
Our beliefs and attitudes that are behind our behavior and actions,  
are about reshaping a life in Christ in contrast to world & culture.

God's purpose is to change us and our whole perspective,  
by developing our character, to transform and enlarge us,  
for us to learn to trust and let God be our strength.

As God's own beloved & blessed, the Lord intends for us to become  
a people capable of receiving and living into the kingdom of God.

That has been God's intent, God's purpose and will all along.

When God rescued the Hebrews from the bondage of slavery in Egypt  
they were to become a covenant people who live as God intends,  
in contrast and different from the world all around them.

But they refused to do this, and rather than walking in God's ways,  
over time they increasingly adopted their pagan neighbors' ways,  
and even exceeding their neighbors' injustice and greed.

By the time of the prophet Micah,  
outwardly, the nation of Israel appeared to be very religious,  
and yet the nation of Israel had become exceedingly corrupt.

The wealthy land owners used taxes to steal land from the powerless,  
in the marketplace, merchants cheated by using dishonest scales,  
and the powerful routinely used the courts to steal from the poor.  
Corrupt leaders used their position and authority for personal gain.

For 5 chapters, the prophet condemns various ways the nation  
has abandoned God and how they had been instructed to live.  
Micah lays it out like evidence that's being presented in a lawsuit,  
stating that the Lord has a complaint against the people of Israel,  
the descendants of those God had saved from Egyptian slavery.

It is painfully obvious that the nation has broken God's covenant.

God's message through Micah comes in the format of a trial, vs. 1-2,  
Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you  
mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with  
his people, and he will contend with Israel.

Creation itself will be called as jury to hear God's complaint,  
for the mountains have seen it all and observed over time.

Confronted with the truth of God's accusations and their guilt,  
listen, and hear how the people of Israel respond, vs. 6-7,

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt  
offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for  
my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

How typically human, what can **I do** to make up for the harm I have done?

'What will it take to buy God's mercy and good will?

'What must I do, what must I give to make up for my past?

God was not interested in any huge payment of stuff or sacrifice,  
as if God's favor and love were commodities that can be purchased.  
God's focus is not our stuff or our deeds - but actually **God wants us**.

God wants to be our God, to have an authentic relationship with us,  
so that God can bless and guide us toward living in truth,  
in the wonderful and meaningful life God intends for us...

... and for us to look at life through the lens of that relationship.

God has given us this time and place in which to live and learn,  
in which to grow in our faith and walk ever closer with our God.

So how does experiencing God's gracious love change how we live? ,  
and what does God really want? ... and how can we please the Lord?

Through the prophet Micah, the Lord gives us the answer... vs. 8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**It's not about what we have, or even what we do, but who we are.**

It's not about enduring long and boring sermons on Sunday,  
but for us to let God guide over every aspect of our lives...

... which then directs our relationships out in the world around us,  
including, calling us to be alert enough to see others in need,  
and by shifting our focus off of ourselves & our desires,  
as we're blessed & stirred by our loving and merciful God.

What does God really want? How can we please the Lord God?  
The real question is, what is God's will & intention for my life  
as a gift to make a difference in this world and lives around us.

1<sup>st</sup> -- to do justice

In the Old Testament, justice is a very broad concept,  
which includes God's desire and intention  
for us to live together in peaceful harmonious community,  
by following the ideals of justice, mercy & fair treatment.

God's justice calls us to be balanced in caring relationships  
which place the good, benefit and welfare of other people  
ahead of our own ego, wants, desires and inclinations.

Justice is making decisions and choices in life  
that honor God's truth and gracious love for all of us.

**To do justice is difficult, but not complicated.**

2<sup>nd</sup> -- to love kindness

In Hebrew, loving-kindness is a word that describes  
God's love, mercy, nurture and compassion toward us,  
and our call to respond by showing that same  
compassion, mercy and kindness toward other people.

It describes a life that is defined by God's grace and Truth,  
that then guides our affections, our treatment of all others.

**Again, it's not all that complicated, but it can be very difficult.**

3<sup>rd</sup> -- to walk humbly with God

Humility is recognizing our need and dependence before God.  
It's when our relationship with God is our life's anchor  
and we are sensitive to God's presence and blessings.

**It is living to honor and deepen our relationship with the Lord.**

So, as I considered the message of these texts this week,  
I tried to recall some specifics of my own spiritual journey,  
the circumstances and instances of my faith increasing...

... and one thing in particular seemed to unify all of them,  
my moments of truth and insight, and of deepest inspiration,  
were **when the reality of God's love became most clear**  
in wonderfully new, transforming & significant ways...

... and these unexpected surges in my faith and my walk with God  
were **when I understood and believed that the scope of God's love**  
**extends far beyond where I had previously trusted and believed.**

In my experience, my most significant surges of growth toward God

have never been anything I have done as in a behavior or deed,  
but my spiritual spurts have always come as an enlargement  
of my appreciation of God's great mercy and awesome love.

Certainly, it's helped to become more disciplined in prayer.  
It has helped to read more of the Bible more regularly,  
and it was important to be a Christian in fellowship,  
and to actively and faithfully serve in the church.

Certainly, I had to be where I could hear and respond to God's voice,  
but it was not by my religious deeds or good works  
that spurts & surges of spiritual growth were accomplished...

... but rather, it has always been, totally the gracious work of God,  
as step by step, I would increasingly observe and recognize  
in a progression of revelation, in a process of experience,  
as more and more I learned what it truly means to say,  
"God is love", **and that God does love even me,**  
**and desires to love all of creation through me.**

I find it especially helpful to personalize Micah's message in vs. 8,  
Norm, he has told you what is good; and what does the Lord require of Norm but that you do justice, and that you  
love kindness, and that Norm walks humbly with your God?

The call today is not to take a specific action or try harder.  
It's a call to reflect, and then **respond from within, deep within,**  
according to the powerful truth of God's love, mercy and grace,  
for that's what leads to **a real & living faith** pleasing to the Lord.