

Introduction – Consider the question, "Why are you here?"

Like the famous cellist, sometimes we lose sight of our reason for being where we are.

#### A. Sometimes, God's People Lose Their Way

1. Other things become central, in place of God's purpose for our being. What you have, what pleasures or comforts you enjoy, what you do for work or play...these become central.

I wonder how many of us have this happen. It's very easy to not even realize what's going on. Then things that will ultimately pass away wind up taking on an "eternal" significance, and eternal things get "demoted" (relegated to a lower position) or skipped altogether.

2. The people of Judah were like that, but even worse! They had lost their way, for they lost sight of what brings one near to God! Their religion, in the sense of their outward practices which they felt they had to do, was what they had to offer to God. Their hearts were not in it, as you can see if you reflect on the complaining tone and exaggerated, escalating nature of what they say in v.6-7.

3. But the Lord was calling them and would continue to call them back to grace! Verses 4-5 make this clear, by bracketing their entire wilderness time between Egypt and the Jordan River (the Plains of Moab, where the Balaam-incident took place, were where they awaited entry into the Promised Land).

So, while v. 1-2 sound ominous, they really introduce God's call to return to Him by grace!

#### B. The Lord Graciously Shines Light on the Path

1. He has spoken clearly. There is no room for complaint that we don't have a clue what we should do in the service of God.

2. He speaks of a response to grace, not a sacrifice to earn favor.

3. This is what the Lord requires:

a. To do justice – It is easy to think of justice only as the punishment that wrongdoers should receive.

But there's another side to biblical justice. Several passages will help you see this: Dt.10:17-19, Ps.146:7-9, Zech.7:10-11

Two important ideas flow from these texts: (1) In Scripture, doing justice has to do with helping those who have suffered *injustice*. This is an important point, because it makes it clear that helping such people is not an optional work, in the category with how often you floss your teeth. And (2) those who are often in the position of needing help as a result of injustice fall into four categories - the poor, widows, orphans and the "stranger" (Tim Keller suggests that "immigrant" would be a good English equivalent for this Hebrew word.)

b. To love mercy/kindness – this may be the inner attitude that must be present in order to outwardly "do justice", but even if that's "all" it is, it is a significant requirement. Consider how the Pharisees of Jesus' day fell so completely short of this standard. Think even of Jesus' disciples, as illustrated by their disinterest in the little children who came to Jesus or by the words of James and John recorded in Luke 9:54. To love mercy is very different from practically salivating at the thought that someone else is going to "get what's coming" to them.

c. To walk humbly – the word used here may be even broader than humility. It has the sense of "prudently" or "circumspectly" in other passages. But in any case, even that broader meaning would include humility before the Lord of all the earth.

Conclusion – if the people of Judah were to do these things, how much more those whose redemption is not merely the picture of Egypt and Canaan, but the real thing (that is, the gift of life itself through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus)? So I ask you, do you know why you're here? I believe many of you do! And if you've lost your way a bit (or maybe never been very clear about it), then I urge you: Turn away from whatever has improperly become the center of your life, in order to Do justice, Love mercy, and Walk humbly with your God.