

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

What Does The Lord Require Of You

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Micah 6:1-8

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to the Book of Micah. In order to make any sense of Micah's message you have to have an understanding of Micah's context. The prophet Micah ministered over a long and extremely significant period of history. Most of his ministry happened in the 8th century B.C. in the years leading up to the exile of Northern Israel by Assyria. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and they appear to have collaborated in their ministry and writing. In terms of the spiritual climate in Micah's day, we learn most of what we need to know from the Book of Amos, who preached a generation earlier. Two weeks ago here I preached a sermon called "Bad Religion" detailing Amos' description of what was wrong with the religious life of Israel. Israel had become lawless and self deceived. They had turned away from Scripture and had invented false theologies and resurrected old lies and long abandoned heresies. They had personalized religion and stripped it of any moral or social implication, they had become ungrateful and forgetful and they had stopped rehearsing the historic acts of their redemption. They had promoted moral laxity and they had become stubborn in their refusal to hear doctrinal preaching and prophetic rebuke. They had cherished false hopes and were beset with false security. All of that is assumed and much of it repeated in the Book of Micah. God's so called

covenant people worshipped in the style of the pagans and held to a corrupted and tamed theology that bore no resemblance to the teaching of the Bible. As a result their society was becoming increasingly perverted and unjust and God was being blasphemed among the nations.

You see the problem with calling yourself God's people but living like the pagans is that ultimately it is God that is defamed. That was the problem in Amos' day and it was still the problem in Micah's day.

Politically the clouds of doom were beginning to gather around Israel. Assyria was asserting itself on the international stage and was becoming a truly global empire. The deal with Assyria generally was that if you paid them tribute then they would leave you more or less alone but if you refused to pay or you even contemplated rebellion they would crush you like a bug and terrorize you into submission. You've heard me say many times that the Assyrians were the first nation in recorded history to use terror tactics as a tool of international politics. They would rip open the wombs of pregnant women, dash babies against city walls and they would intentionally scandalize the religious sensitivities of their subject people. Archaeologists have found mass graves in Israel from the time of the Assyrian occupations where they threw 3000 dead bodies into a pit and then desecrated the grave with pig bones before burying the whole thing under the sand. Can you think of anything more offensive to a Jew than being buried in a mass grave full of pig bones? That's what the Assyrians would do to a town to send a message to the nation that rebellion will not turn out in their favour.

Micah began to minister in the early days of Assyrian harassment. By the end of Micah's ministry Assyria was fully mobilized and was bent upon the wholesale destruction and elimination of all Israel. It was a holocaust in the end for the Northern tribes and Micah saw it coming.

As Micah spoke into these events he consistently interpreted them as the Sovereign action of the Almighty God. These were not random events or mere political setbacks; these events and this series of rolling catastrophes were proof positive that God had begun to invoke the curses of the Mosaic Covenant. Micah was successful in Judah – Jeremiah 26 records how his preaching finally converted Hezekiah and initiated a revival which caused God to relent in his punishment

and grant reprieve to the Southern Kingdom. He was not successful in Northern Israel and they were ultimately slaughtered and dispersed into exile.

The structure of Micah is very complex. The book as we have it is really a collection of sermons that are knit together on a thematic basis and so there are jarring transitions from oracles of doom to promises of hope, from declarations of total destruction to far future glimpses of Messiah and eternal triumph. I would be biting off more than we could chew this morning to attempt to cover the whole book and so instead I want to highlight for you a beautiful picture of how God wants his covenant people to respond to his love and redemption as found in Micah 6. Amos painted a picture of wrong response – of BAD RELIGION, now Micah paints a picture of RIGHT RESPONSE or GOOD RELIGION. Despite what you may have heard the Bible is not opposed to religion PER SE it is opposed to wrong religion. According to the Bible there is wrong religion and there is right religion and instead of trying to invent new terminology we need to just focus on what the Bible says about the right way to respond to the love and grace of God. Micah chapter 6 helps us to do just that. Go there with me now.

A Picture Of Right Religion

In Micah 6:1-8 the prophet presents his message in the form of a courtroom drama. He has God as the plaintiff, Israel as the defendant and the mountains as witnesses. In this dramatic oracle God accuses Israel of not responding to his love and saving works correctly and then he explains at the end how they should have responded.

The historical setting for this oracle is during the time of the invasion of Assyria deep into Northern Israel. Assyria was now fully on the warpath. She was going to erase Israel and many refugees were fleeing south into Judah and specifically into Jerusalem. They were thronging around the temple seeking to secure the Lord's favour and deliverance. Micah begins preaching to this crowd of refugees and this is what he says:

¹Hear now what the LORD says:

“Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
And let the hills hear your voice.

² 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. (NKJV)

Here the prophet establishes the form of his oracle; he is picturing a court room scene where God brings a charge against Israel. He summons the mountains as the oldest created thing, creatures who have “seen it all” as it were, to serve as witnesses. Now he begins to unpack the Lord’s accusation:

³ “O My people, what have I done to you?
And how have I wearied you?
Testify against Me.

“How have I wronged you?” God asks. “You complain that I have broken the covenant and failed to protect you from your enemies, but is it true that I am in the wrong? You say that the covenant obligations I laid upon you were unreasonable and burdensome, but is that so?” asks the Lord.

⁴ 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.
⁵ O My people, remember now
What Balak king of Moab counseled,
And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
From ^fAcacia Grove to Gilgal,
That you may know the righteousness of the LORD.”

“All I did,” says the Lord, “is redeem you out of slavery and make you a people for myself.” He uses the words of preamble from the 10 Commandments, do you see that? What is the preamble to the 10 Commandments?

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Exodus 20:2. NKJV)

He sets his argument in the context of the covenant agreement. He says: “I haven’t changed – you have! I am still the God who saved you but you haven’t kept up your end of the deal.” He goes on to say that in addition to saving them he brought them into the land of promise even against the opposition of their enemies. The phrase “from Acacia Grove to Gilgal” is a reference to the crossing of the Jordan. He is saying: “Moab opposed you and Balaam tried to curse you,

but I delivered you safely out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Is it for this that you abandoned me?”

“I did all of this,” argues the Lord, “so that you would know the righteousness of your God. I set you free, I made you a people who were no people SO THAT you would know me and enjoy me forever.”

What is the chief end of man, my friends? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. As it is today, so it was then, but they did not delight to know the Lord, but, if you remember the story from 1 Kings, they went on to break the 2nd commandment and as a nation they invented idols and remade God in the image of the gods of the pagans. They set up calves at Bethel and Dan so that the people didn’t have to travel all the way to Jerusalem and they worshipped a version of God that was not in alignment with the commandments of God. As a result they drifted into what can only be called “Quasi Jewish Paganism” – a religion of cultural accommodation and synthesis.

“And now when you need me”, God says, “you come back as a flood to my temple, long abandoned by you, and you seek to buy my favour as if I was some sort of whore.” Micah now begins to speak in the voice of the gathered refugees. He says to them: “You are saying in your hearts:”

⁶ 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?

⁷ 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?

The refugees gathered around the temple think that the reason God has abandoned them to their enemies might be that their worship is not costly enough! “Maybe a lamb is not enough, maybe we should give God a whole cow?” A lamb in today’s terms would cost about \$130 but a year old cow would cost almost 10 times that. “But maybe it isn’t the price of the offering”, they suggest, “maybe it is the number of offerings. Maybe we need to offer thousands of rams? Or maybe God would rather have oil? Or maybe”, some are even thinking, “maybe to win back God’s love, we will have to sacrifice our first born child?”

Do you see how little these people know God? They have worshipped their own god of fancy for so long that they have no idea who Yahweh really is. It is the pagan gods that delight in child sacrifice, Yahweh has explicitly spoken against this disgusting practice:

²¹And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through *the fire* to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the LORD. (Leviticus 18:21. NKJV)

God has explicitly forbidden child sacrifice and yet now, to win back his favour, these refugees think that maybe this will do the trick! “You don’t even know me” says the Lord. “I am not a God who can be bought with the sacrifice of a son, I am a God who will buy you at the cost of my son.” These people had no idea who they were talking to. There are people, my friends, in the Old Testament and in the New who are sure they are worshipping God, when in fact, they are horribly and tragically deceived. Jesus said that too:

²²Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you (Matthew 7:22-23. NKJV)

Idolatry is deadly. It is far better to be an atheist than to be an idolater. An idolater thinks he is worshipping God and discovers far too late that he has been worshipping an idol of his own imagination.

Now the prophet delivers the closing argument and in it gives us this picture we have been waiting for, the picture of right religion. He ends his dramatic oracle by declaring that ignorance is no defence! You cannot say that you didn’t know how to respond correctly to God, you cannot say that. God saved us and then he showed us how to respond – that’s why he has quoted the preamble to the 10 Commandments. The 10 Commandments do not save us – the 10 Commandments are given to SAVED PEOPLE – people who had already been set free from Egypt and the house of bondage – the 10 Commandments are not about how to get saved! The 10 Commandments are about how saved people SHOULD RESPOND to the love and grace of their redeemer. “You should have known that”, the prophet says, “cause God told you that in his Holy Word. If you’d read it you’d know, but you didn’t and that’s no excuse”.

⁸ 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 6:1-8. NKJV)

The right way to respond to the saving acts of Almighty God is by doing justice, loving mercy and walking humble with your God. That is a pretty important statement coming as it does at the climax of this dramatic oracle, so let's make sure we know what those words mean. Right religion, or right responding, however you want to label this begins with:

1. Doing justly

The Hebrew word here is *mishpat* and comes from the Hebrew root *shapat* which means “to judge” or “to govern”. It refers primarily to processes of government. In the form *mishpat* as here it has the sense of “doing justice”. It means a right way of living, either as an individual or as a nation that is rooted in the moral character of God. Be holy as I am holy. God is the author of life, therefore do not murder. God is faithful, therefore do not commit adultery. God is generous therefore don't steal. God is truth, therefore don't lie. God is our provider, therefore do not covet. That sort of thing. To “do justice” therefore means to order your life or your nation in response to God's revealed character.

You have to remember here that this whole dramatic oracle has been presented in the form of a covenant lawsuit. God has quoted the preamble to the 10 Commandments which is the heart or holy centre of the Mosaic Covenant. The refugees were all gathering around the temple complaining in their hearts that God has violated the covenant in failing to rescue them from the Assyrians. God shows up and turns the table and accuses them of breaking the covenant and thereby forfeiting any claim on his protective services. God is saying: “You wanted to change the deal. You reinvented religion, you reinvented me. You created a God who didn't hate sin, who could be bribed, cajoled and placated, but I am not that God. My requirements have not changed. As I said to Moses on Mount Sinai so now I say to you. If you want to respond to my love and be in a covenant relationship with me – keep my commandments. Live in accordance with the moral character you see in me.” Do you understand that my friends? Despite the word games played by today's contemporary pastors, the Bible says it's impossible to be in a relationship with God that does not involve respect for his commandments. Religion is not the

opposite of relationship; right religion is the response to relationship. Right religion responds to grace by doing justly. Right religion also involves:

2. Loving mercy

The key word here is the Hebrew word *khesed*. *Khesed* is notoriously hard to translate into English as evidenced by the wide array of words used in various translations. The old KJV had “lovingkindness”, some of the newer translations have “loyalty”, “covenant love” and most commonly, and I think most helpfully, we have “mercy” as here in the NKJV. When the LXX translates this passage into Greek it does so using the word *eleos* which in the New Testament is generally translated into English as mercy, and so I think that is the sense here.¹

Jesus taught a lot on how saved people who have experienced God’s mercy need to respond by showing mercy to their fellow man. Two stories in particular leave us in no doubt as to how Jesus understood this term. The most important of those stories is probably the parable of the Good Samaritan. The story means to provide us with a definition of mercy and with a motivation for mercy. You see as you study the parable you come to realize that Jesus is our Good Samaritan! Jesus found us lying dead on the side of the road with no one to help us. He came near – he didn’t pass by, he got involved, he took on FLESH! He poured the oil of his own blood upon our wounds and he carried us by his grace and he placed us inside a healing community – the church – and he paid handsomely and supplied amply for our well being. He did it all for us and now he says to us: “Go and do thou likewise. As saved people who have known mercy go and show mercy to your fellow man.” Mercy is how saved people live!

In the story of the unforgiving servant Jesus developed his teaching on mercy still further. The servant in that parable was forgiven a great debt, his master had mercy on him but then he went out and found somebody who owed him a small amount and he cast him into prison until he could pay it all. And Jesus told us how the master, who represents God in the parable, will respond:

¹ The Theological Wordbook of The Old Testament defines *khesed* this way: “It (*khesed*) is a kind of love, including mercy... when the object is in a pitiful state. It often takes verbs of action, “do”, or “keep”, and so refers to acts of love as well as to the attribute. The word “lovingkindness” of the KJV is archaic, but not far from the fullness of meaning of the word.” (307)

³²Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³And should not you have had **mercy** on your fellow servant, as I had **mercy** on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.’ (Matthew 18:32-24. ESV)

The right response to God’s mercy is for us to show mercy to others. We do that by forgiving people who have wronged us, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors - and we do that by helping people who are helpless. That is what it means to love mercy and that is part of how God expects us to respond to his saving work in our lives. Lastly in terms of right response to the saving work of God, we need to be found:

3. Walking humbly with our God

The key word here is *tsana* and this is the only time it is used in the Bible and therefore we are not 100% sure what it means. Biblical Hebrew is a dead language so we figure out the meaning of words by seeing how they are used in a variety of contexts but there is no variety of contexts for this word there is just this one verse. What we know is that it doesn’t mean humble simply in the sense of not being arrogant. There is a word for that, the Hebrew word *anav* which is used of Moses in Numbers 12:3, Moses was the most humble man – being humble is good but that isn’t quite what is being said here. D.W. Thomas says that this word *tsana* in Micah 6:8 means that a man is “guarded, careful, in walking with his God, in carrying out the Divine will.”² It means therefore, something very close to what Isaiah 66:2 means. Micah’s friend and collaborator prophet said it this way:

But this is the one to whom I will look,
to the humble and contrite in spirit,
who trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2. NRSV)

It’s not the same exact word, but it is the same idea. To walk humbly with your God means to be reverent – to never lose sight of the fact that this is the God who holds sway over souls. This is the God who can do more than kill the body he can cast body and soul into hell. It means to remember the Majesty of God and to be consequently very interested in knowing his will so as to do it. The Teacher said it this way:

² D.W. Thomas in “The Root *tsana*”, JJS I (1949) p.182-188 as quoted in TOTC Waltke, p. 214.

²⁶ In the fear of the LORD *there is* strong confidence,
And His children will have a place of refuge. (Proverbs 14:26. NKJV)

In Micah 6:8 God is closing his legal argument by saying: “You did not fear me. You did not walk humbly before me. You were not careful to know my will and to do it. Therefore you shall have no confidence before your enemies. You are not my children and you will find no refuge in me.”

And that of course is how the story played out. As I told you two weeks ago the Assyrians cut through the army of the Northern Kingdom like a hot knife through butter. It was a slaughter. The Northern Tribes ceased to exist. They are to this day, not a people. Some few refugees were absorbed into the Southern Kingdom but the nation of Israel – the Northern Kingdom is gone. They thought they were God’s people but in the day of trial and tribulation they discovered that they were not. They looked nothing like a saved people would look. There was no justice, there was no mercy there was no fear of the Lord and love for his commandments. And on that day God said to those people: “I never knew you, away from me you workers of lawlessness”.

The Gospel In Micah:

Now if we left the story there, this would not be a Gospel message would it? The Reformers said you should be able to find the Gospel and Jesus on every page of the Old Testament. Finding the Gospel in Micah is actually very easy. This message of doom, which is really what Micah 6:8 is – most of the people who have claimed this as their life verse have no idea that it is actually a verdict of condemnation read over a bunch of desperate refugees about to be forsaken by God – this message of doom is bracketed with Gospel hope. In Micah 5 we have one of the most beautiful anticipations of Messiah in all of Holy Scripture:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth *are* from of old,
From everlasting.”... (Micah 5:2. NKJV)

“Messiah will come. He will feed us”, Micah goes on to say, “and he will stand where we fell. He will stand and become our Peace.” On the other side of the message of condemnation and

doom in Micah 6 there is another Gospel passage. In Micah 7 the prophet closes his book by looking into the far future and seeing a day when:

He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.
You will cast all ⁴our sins
Into the depths of the sea.
²⁰ You will give truth to Jacob
And mercy to Abraham,
Which You have sworn to our fathers
From days of old. (Micah 7:19-20. NKJV)

Do you hear that? My friends, if that isn't the Gospel than I don't what is! Think about how Micah lays out his message. He holds up a standard of what right religion looks like – the person who responds to the saving work of God by doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly and he says: “We’ve never done this! We’ve never honoured God by giving him what he deserved. We’ve never done this and we stand justly condemned today, we stand rightly chastised and abandoned! God has not done wrong, WE HAVE DONE WRONG!” But then when all hope must have seemed lost to these refugees he paints a picture of a coming Messiah who will do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He will respond to God perfectly. He will keep all the commandments, he will do justly, he will love mercy – he will be the Good Samaritan – and he will walk humbly, he will humble himself to death, even death upon a cross. Jesus is not irreligious, Jesus is the only RIGHTLY RELIGIOUS person to have ever lived! He will do it all and he will do it for us. And now, here at the end of his message, Micah says that Messiah will come and have compassion on us. He will subdue our iniquity – he will do more than forgive our sins he will heal our sin nature, praise the Lord, and he will give to us those things we need to respond to God aright. He will give us truth and he will give us mercy and he will cause us to persevere in the paths of old. That is the Gospel, my friends, in all its glorious fullness!

Conclusion:

Because of Jesus, because of what he did for us and what he does in us, we can respond to God in the way that he requires. Before Christ Micah 6:8 was a death sentence – we were not able to do that which God requires. That is an awful and a desperate place to be! But now because of Christ and his Spirit at work in us WE CAN! By the grace of God in us we can be rightly religious. What God wants from us hasn't changed, what has changed is what God has given to

us so that we can respond to Him as he desires. He has shown us what he wants. He wants us to do justly, to live according to his character, he wants us to love mercy – to rescue the hopeless and forgive those who wrong us, he wants us to walk humbly – to fear the Lord and to tremble at his Word. That’s the right response. That’s good religion and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.