

Transcript of Sermon By  
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## What the Lord Requires

### Micah 6:1-8

#### Meditation Text:

Consider a harder, but more excellent, way. A group of lively Christians gets together to pray, eat breakfast, and discuss strategy for demonstrating the lordship of Christ in their business practices that day. They ask: “How, today, can we write a policy, sell a house, lobby for a law, advertise a product, in a way that honors Christ and makes God’s name more respected? How can we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God as members of our profession? How can we keep our jobs and still do what is right? How can we avoid being conformed to this world and yet work effectively in it as transformers of culture for Christ’s sake?”

—Cornelius Plantinga in *Beyond Doubt*

Have you ever known someone that who could not please? Whatever you did, it just never seemed to be enough. Perhaps it was an employer or professor. You would do something one way and they would always come back and tell you to do it another way. Then when you did it the other way, they would say, “Well, it’s too late now.” There was just no pleasing them.

Perhaps you had a relationship with the opposite sex earlier in life, and whatever you did was not necessarily wrong, but it just never seemed to be enough. You would buy a gift, and the gift always seemed to be under appreciated. It was as if you should have thought of more, you should have added more, you should have done a little extra.

Then there is the great mysterious relationship between parents and children. It doesn’t matter whether the children in the relationship are 8, 18, or 58 but sometimes there just doesn’t seem to be a way to do the right thing. It seems that you are cursed if you do and cursed if you don’t. If you do what you think will please the other party, then sure enough they wanted you to do something else. Have you had a relationship with someone that it just seemed like whatever you did it wasn’t quite right? You wish that somebody would write it out for you and give you a job description of the relationship so that you would know what was expected.

Fortunately, in our relationship with God, it doesn't work that way. Thanks to the Prophet Micah, Micah helps us understand exactly what it is that God wants from us. Micah is considered a Minor Prophet. That means, basically, that the book associated with his name is shorter than the larger ones which are Major Prophets.

Micah lived 700 years before the time of Christ. During the time in which Micah lived, the people of Israel had divided into two kingdoms, north and south. The Northern Kingdom had been destroyed and there was some concern that the Southern Kingdom might be destroyed as well. The passage from Micah 6 sounds like a dialogue in a court setting. The people are concerned and God is bringing a complaint against them. God said, "Look at all these things I have done for you."

Then there is an almost sarcastic response, "What should I do? What would God really want from me? Elaborate sacrifices?" It even mentions, "Should I sacrifice my firstborn?" Sad to say, three different times in the history of the people of Israel, they took on the practices of neighboring nations, and kings of Israel and Judah sacrificed their firstborn thinking that was what God would require. Certainly, that is not it. It is very tongue-in-cheek, very sarcastic. Certainly, that is not what God would want. But they are asking, "What is happening to us? We are fearful that our nation is going to be destroyed. What could we do to please God? Surely, God is punishing us. If we could just think what to do to please God, everything would be OK."

Micah gives a three-point description of what the relationship with God would entail. *Love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God.* A relationship with God is not a dysfunctional relationship like some of us have with other people in our lives where we can't ever figure out what it is we are supposed to do and it is not some mystery religion where we have to go find an obscure verse of scripture with the hope that if we can get somebody to explain this odd passage of scripture, we would understand what God wants. It is very clear. Here are three things: love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God.

Some translations use the word *kindness*. I think kindness is a little bland. We all have an idea of what mercy is, but the mercy of God toward us are those kind acts where God intervenes, where God blesses, where God answers, and some of these are even listed in the passage. Between us, it is mercy when, as an act of compassion, we do what helps other people. In some faith traditions within the Christian faith, they speak of very specific acts of mercy where we do things that bless other people. We do things that lift other people up out of the compassion of our hearts. That is not hard, but we are not simply asked to do that. We are asked to love mercy so that our whole heart follows, as we would understand with our knowledge of the New Testament, so that our hearts seek after Jesus Christ. It is not arbitrary, it is not occasional, but it is a whole way of life that we love mercy. We love the way life is when we do good for people who need it. We love the way life is when we can lift someone up, help somebody else, unexpectedly and undeserved, because God asked us to.

I preached last fall about justice. This is not a test. You are not asked to pull out and remember anything from that, but I will just say that justice in the Bible is not about law and order. It is not about, *Here's a law and everybody who breaks it ought to go to jail.* Justice, in the Bible is about what is right, what is fair, and giving to all people. As a matter of fact, this is

really harder than loving mercy because we are not simply being asked to care about people, but we are being asked to forego advantage. I think one of the hardest things in life is to forego an advantage.

Have you ever had a leg up on somebody? Maybe they did something and they owed you or you found them out about something, and one of the hardest things is to give that up. We can all think of times in our lives where someone kept turning that screw a little bit and a little bit. Justice, in the Bible, is about trying to create a way of life where everyone has the same advantage.

I will use one illustration that I used last fall. Somebody gave it to me and I thought it was so great. When you were little and you raced a brother, sister, or neighbor and they were faster and would give you a head start, instinctively, the person giving the head start always knows just how much to give and still not lose. Did anybody ever give you a head start and then you won? If you did, you didn't win again because they cut back the head start after that. Justice is trying to put everybody in life at an equal place where the opportunity is the same. It is amazing how much justice, in this regard, is spoken of in the Old Testament. Alms for the poor are easy. Compassion for somebody in need is easy. Foregoing an advantage so that everybody might have justice is much harder. It is not simply that we are asked to recognize this but we are asked to do it.

I think the key in the whole passage is humility. We have a very bad image of humility. We associate it with being weak, having a poor self image, and caving in whenever somebody asks us to do something. Humility, truly understood in the Bible, is understanding the truth about ourselves and our relationship with God. Where do we really stand? None of us has perfect knowledge. None of us knows everything; therefore, if we are humble enough, we can listen to God. None of us are perfect in our actions. Christ was the only one who was; therefore, if we are going to have a relationship with God, it is not based on how good we are, but on God's grace. If we have all experienced God's grace, then doesn't that mean we have to be willing to grant forgiveness to somebody else? Would we who needed forgiveness to be right with God withhold forgiveness from somebody else? If we understand correctly, if we say, sing, and pray about Jesus Christ being Lord, then doesn't that mean that all of us are servants of Christ?

True humility is recognizing where we stand. I am not superior to you and you are not superior to me but we all stand equal under God in need of God's help. We are deathly afraid sometimes to be humble for fear that people will think we are weak. We are afraid to truly listen to somebody else because people will think that we don't have strength and conviction. We are afraid sometimes to admit our error because people will think we are wrong all the time. How hard is it to admit you are wrong? Humility is the key and humility is what is so hard but humility, I believe, is the key to life and the key to a good, growing relationship with God. Technically, you can love mercy and do justice without being humble, but if you are humble, all these other things fall into place.

If we really want a right relationship with God, can God teach us anything unless we are humble enough to have open hearts? We pray for God's guidance but how can God really give it to us if we are so proud that we think we really don't need it. How can God strengthen us if we

are so proud of our own strength? If we are so convinced of our own righteousness, how can we ever experience the blessing of God's forgiveness?

Humility is the key to it all. Humility opens the door so that God can come in and give us all the things that we always wanted, give us the things that we know we need.

In our relationship with God, what does God want? It is not a mystery. It is not a dysfunctional relationship where you cannot figure it out. God wants us to do the best things we can do for ourselves in our relationship with him—to love mercy, to be the kind of people who incorporate it in our lives every day, all the time; to live out kindness and compassion, to do justice, to be concerned about what is true, fair, right, and good in the world for all people, and not just what benefits ourselves.

How else do we receive the blessings that God might give to us unless we know, and can admit, that we need them?

May God give us eyes to see the truth about where we really stand in life. May God give us hearts to love caring for each other and for other people. May God give us the will to do justice even when it is unpopular. May God give us spirits that recognize just how much we need God. May he give us these things in the New Year and always.

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