

## WHAT IS THE LORD TRULY SEEKING FROM YOU?

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Triune God who has shown you what is good: to act, love and walk in his way. Amen. The text on which we will meditate together this morning is Micah 6:1-8.

*Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. <sup>2</sup> Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. <sup>3</sup> "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. <sup>4</sup> I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. <sup>5</sup> My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD." <sup>6</sup> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*  
(NIV)

The Bronze Snake, the defeat of Sihon King of the Amorites and Og King of Bashan, these events were famous to the Israelites. The Bible tells us that the people preserved the Bronze Snake and a cult formed around it. The defeat of the two kings, Sihon and Og, was the Lexington and Concord for the Israelites; their first victory in the conquest of Palestine. But that was the problem. The Israelites were considering it "their" victory when "they" conquered Palestine. They had begun to worship the Snake and not the God who performed a miracle in connection with that artifact. Micah knew that these two incidents were the most famous and well-known parts of a certain section of Scripture, Numbers 20-25. And so he used that part of Scripture *without* those two famous incidents to preach a sermon, to remind the people of something they should have known, and in doing so he also reminds us: **What is the Lord truly seeking from you?** The Lord seeks us to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.

**I. A.** Micah calls Israel onto the witness stand. This is one of many courtroom scenes in the Bible. But here the jury is made up of mountains and hills. A lot happened to God's people in connection with mountains, one of the most important was the giving of the Law, the Ten Commandments. But what about the hills? It was on the "high places" that Israel turned away from the Ten Commandments and either worshipped God in ways he had not prescribed even worshipping false gods.

But Micah also places God on the witness stand. The same mountains are called out to hear God's case, the mountains God himself had made. Mountains on which God had made one-sided covenants with his people. And on one of those very mountains, the one on which God substituted a ram for Isaac. God substituted Jesus Christ for our sins. Micah also calls the "permanent foundations of the earth" to hear God's case, a reminder of who made the earth in the first place.

When God is on the witness stand and at the same time holding the gavel, who can hope to survive the judgment? Left to ourselves, we are all condemned. And that was the point Micah wanted to make to his listeners.

**B.** In Micah's time, Ahaz the King of Judah was guilty of outright pagan idolatry. The Bible tells us that this man sacrificed his own son. Micah publicly rebukes the king for sacrificing his firstborn. But he doesn't want his people to smugly think it's just their leaders in government who are sinning. The prophet graphically illustrates the attitude of the people at worship. Their king was, yes, guilty of pagan idolatry and human sacrifice, but the people pointing fingers needed to know that their own attitude was sinful. They were going to the right church, but for the wrong reason. This is what they were thinking: **with what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression?** The people were caught up in the vast number of required sacrifices and were wondering if God would ever be satisfied. They didn't understand that God wasn't interested in the required 1,072 lambs, 103 bulls, 55 assorted rams and goats plus food and drink offerings, lamp oil and showbread. What was God interested in? What was in the heart? God wanted the people to act justly because God had shown them mercy.

**C.** What about us? What is God's witness against you and me? All of us here at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have the privilege not only of worshipping him but of leading worship. But has this ever happened to you? When you find yourself back in the pew rather than up here, you sometimes over-analyze what is being done up here? Rather than allowing a chapel talk fill us up with God's wonderful message of grace and blessings in this life and in the next, we think to ourselves, "That's not what I would have done with that text....He really missed the boat on that one...I can't believe he forgot the benediction!"

What is God's judgment for the wrong attitude at worship? What did Moses tell the Children of Israel? What was Micah saying to Judah? What is God telling us?

We have a problem we could not, cannot, solve. But God has mercy on us and gave us an acquittal once for all time.

**II. A.** What is the Lord truly seeking from you? Also to love that mercy he shows us, and to give it lovingly. God reminds his people, **"I brought you up out of Egypt, and redeemed you from the land of slavery."** The physical act of rescuing Israel from Egypt was a powerful sign of God's love and of his hand working directly in the lives of his people. God also says, **"I sent Moses to lead you, and Aaron and Miriam."** He sends his people leaders to guide them in God's word, to teach them and to set an example for them. And God reminds us of something else by mentioning Balaam. Balaam's employer, King Balak, wanted him to curse Israel, but God chose to use Balaam for a different purpose. Instead of cursing Israel, nothing but blessings for Israel came out of Balaam's mouth, even one prophecy about the coming Messiah. The only curses Balaam was able to speak were about Israel's enemies.

**B.** The mere mention of Egypt in Micah's time should have told the people something about God's power to save. In the time of the Exodus, Egypt seemed like an inescapable force, but God rescued his people from the most powerful nation on earth at the height of its power. And what was Egypt like in Micah's time? You and I are aware that the Hebrew word for "Egypt" is a dual form, that is, it implies two Egypts, upper and lower. In Micah's time, Egypt was being torn apart by internal struggles, at least three different men were calling themselves "Pharaoh" at the same time. Egypt had become no threat at all, a third-rate has-been of a country. And how do you and I think of Egypt as a world power today? God's hand is mighty to save.

**C.** Much more than delivering us from a powerful earthly enemy, God has delivered us from the biggest, most aggressive, proactive enemy we face; our own sins. We were prisoners in our sins just as much as the Children of Israel were prisoners in Egypt and Micah's congregation in Judah were about to become prisoners in Babylon. Micah's point was that God could certainly save his people from Babylon. Just remember what he did for his obstinate, grumbling, feet-dragging people eight hundred years before in Moses' day. But God saved us even from our sins. He didn't do it by sending ten plagues, parting the Red Sea and protecting us with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. He didn't do it by sending in the Persians to conquer Babylon in a single brilliant tactical maneuver overnight. No, he paid for our sins by suffering a torturous criminal's execution that dragged on hour after unbearable hour. He didn't save us momentarily so that a little while later we might get dragged off into captivity once again. No, he saved us once and for all.

But as if that weren't enough, Micah goes on. Even more than being declared "not guilty" by our holy and merciful God, he also works through us in the world. What is the Lord truly seeking from you? The Lord is seeking that you act justly, even as he has; to love mercy, and to love giving it; and also walk humbly.

**III. A.** Our walk with God is the way he lives in us and the way we respond to him day by day. How has your walk with God gone this morning? Earlier I mentioned the number of required sacrifices there were per year. But that wasn't what God was really after. He told his people and he tells us that he desires mercy, not sacrifice. God wants us to worship him in our hearts first. What comes after that he does not require for you and me.

**B.** In Micah's time those requirements for living hadn't changed since Moses. The sacrifices, the laws, the festivals and the rite of circumcision were all still in place. Micah is pointing out that not only hadn't the requirements changed, but the attitude in the people's hearts hadn't changed all that much, either. The people weren't humbly walking with their God at all. They were still grumbling about bringing the best they had even when they weren't bringing their best.

**C.** God's requirements for us have changed. Jesus has freed us from all those sacrifices. We don't have to tithe (give ten per cent of everything we have). We don't have to dedicate or redeem our firstborn, we don't have to undergo circumcision, we don't have to worship on Saturday, we don't have to celebrate special days, new moons, and so forth. We are freed from all of that by Jesus, who did it all perfectly for us. And we are freed *for* a life of service to that same Jesus Christ, our Savior.

God's requirements have changed. Has our attitude changed? Today, you and I have a new temptation, the temptation to wish he had given us more specific directions than he has. How easy it would be, if there were more precise regulations for us in Scripture about problems we face, with regard to things like fellowship and discipline. But what he has given us is what this Jerusalem Cross illustrates; the directive to go out into the four corners of the earth and preach the Good News about him to all people. And he has given us what we call our Christian freedom, to carry out that directive in whatever way we wish as long as we are faithful to him and his word.

What is the Lord truly seeking from you? Act justly, because in his justice, he showed us mercy. Love that mercy, and tell others about it. And also walk humbly, because he freed us not only from the regulations of the law, but from the guilt of our sinful failure to keep that law. He has freed us to serve him. So go. Serve him in these final two quarters of our formal education. Learn everything you can while you're here. Arm yourself to the teeth and do not forget that once you and I are in the field, we take with us not just weapons against Satan, Sin and synergism, but we take with us the greatest and only arsenal; God's Holy Word, from Moses to Micah to Revelation.

Brothers, act, love, and walk. Because he acted, because he loved, because he walked. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guards your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.