

## What Does God Require of Us?

Scripture Text: Micah 6:1-8

### Introduction

The last sermon in this series, I asked the question, “What does God want most of all for you? What is He most passionate about when it comes to your life?” I answered that question by saying that God wants you to desire Him most of all, to love Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and to be His holy people. God is passionate about having a holy people who will worship Him and give Him glory. We saw in the previous passage of Micah that God works within His people to make them holy – it is God’s work through the Holy Spirit. Our righteousness is not based on anything we do, but on the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. This week I am asking another question, a question that is actually mentioned in the passage we just read: “What does God require of us?”

Think about that: What is it that God requires of His people? He wants us to be holy, but what does He expect from us? I think this is related to our mission statement. We have not mentioned it in a while, so maybe it is a good time to review it here.

*At Good Hope Baptist, we are Sharing the good news about Jesus, creating a Loving place, where His people are Discerning the work He has called them to do, and where His people are Equipping one another to do His work.*

Where I think our mission statement bears the most on this passage is “creating a Loving place.” Creating a loving place means that we are praying for one another, we are enjoying one another’s fellowship, we are teaching, encouraging and serving one another with love and compassion. It also means that we are building (and sometimes re-building) loving and forgiving relationships with one another. This is not just a mission statement for Good Hope, but something God desires for all His children to do. It is something that is important for any church.

### Summary of Micah

As we have been going through the book of Micah, we have seen where the Israelites at that time had turned from God. Over the years, they had forgotten who they were and their duty to God and to each other. For years of disobedience, God was going to punish them and exile them from the land He had given them. But, as we have seen, not all was lost – there was hope. With God’s judgment was also God’s mercy. God was going to send a Shepherd-King from a little town of Bethlehem to restore His people one day. Micah prophesied that this Shepherd-King would gather God’s people one day and would lead them to victory. Micah then wrote about God working in His people to make them holy and today we see that Micah again brings a charge against God’s people and calls them to remember what God requires of them.

This section in Micah is one of the most familiar passages in the book. Micah began this section of the prophesy with “Hear what the Lord says.” God had something very important to tell His people, and He wanted them to listen. Micah summoned the participants in what might be called a legal dispute – Israel, the created order, and

God Himself. The Israelites had broken their covenant with God and Micah, as God's representative, called them to defend themselves before God and all creation. Even the mountains were a witness in this legal proceeding. There are two sections in this passage that I would like to address:

- We should remember that God is just, faithful and loving
- We are to act justly, love mercy, and to live according to God's will

### **Remember God's Faithfulness**

The first thing we see in God's case against His people is a defense of His own faithfulness. Micah reminded Israel of God's righteous acts by asking two questions:

***Micah 6:3*** *O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me!*

The people had broken faith with God and were being punished for their unfaithfulness. Rather than accepting their responsibility in the matter, however, the Israelites apparently believed God had wronged them. Maybe you have felt the same way. Maybe you have asked God that same question: Why, God, have you done me wrong? Why have you treated me so unfairly? These are real questions that we sometimes ask God when bad things happen to us. Some of the Israelites probably were asking the same question, thinking about the impending destruction and the troubles they had and were going to endure. God challenged them to prove their complaints, to prove that He was unfaithful to them. He said, "Answer me!"

Far from doing them wrong, God had cared for His people at many times and in different ways. Micah referred to these as God's "righteous acts." God rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians and provided them safe passage through the Red Sea. God sent people to lead the Israelites through the wilderness. He gave them Moses, the great lawgiver and human founder of the nation; Aaron, the high priest who ministered to the Israelites; and Miriam, a prophetess and poet. Throughout time, God had provided gifted leaders to His people, such as kings and prophets. To the church, God gave apostles, prophets and teachers to build the church up. And to the church now, God calls pastors, teachers and other leaders to lead and care for His people. But Israel rebelled against their spiritual leaders, just as the church at times rebels against its spiritual leaders.

Micah reminded the Israelites how God blessed them even when King Balak wanted the false prophet Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel. The Lord frustrated Balak's plan by forcing Balaam to prophesy good for Israel. Micah also reminded the people to remember how God brought them from the wilderness into the Promised Land, including the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. These saving deeds of the Lord demonstrated His righteous character. God was in the right. It was God's people who were in the wrong. The people of God should have been grateful and fully committed to Him. Instead, they were unfaithful, rebellious to Him, which is why the Lord filed this legal complaint against them. God's love and faithfulness to His people showed that their complaints against Him were baseless. No matter how bad things get, or how bad we get, God remains faithful and just.

## What Does God Require?

Micah's summary of God's faithfulness and legal dispute against His people compelled them to respond. Micah asked, "What then does He require of us? What are we to suppose to do?" Maybe you have wondered that at times: What am I suppose to do to have God's favor? How can I come into the presence of God Almighty? This is the heart of the questions that Micah asked beginning in verse six:

***Micah 6:6-7*** *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?*

With what shall I come before the Lord? This is the question for all people in every age. Some people think that God's favor, much like their own favor, can be bought or earned. We sometimes extend kindness to one another because someone has said or done something to earn our favor. In turn, these people wrongly believe that they can offer God fake sacrifices and meaningless worship when what he asks for is our *loving and obedient hearts*. What God demands of us is not some empty ritual of "playing church" every Sunday and then living like the world the rest of the week. God desires holiness in our lives. He desires heartfelt obedience to Him and His Word and not a fake religious appearance that looks like holiness but is not. God is interested in our hearts not in outward expressions of worship.

Verses six and seven provide a list of rhetorical questions that display the absurdity of Israel's dependence on empty ritual and sacrifice to earn favor with God. What does God want from His people? Are sacrifices what he wants? Would even sacrificing one's child be adequate to cover one's sins, to make one right with God? The way in which the proposals increase in absurdity shows that Micah is exposing Israel's wrong attitude that saw sacrifice as an entry fee to God. Israel had been dependent on going through the motions of religion and missed the point of true worship of God. What the Lord really wants is not our offerings but the allegiance and the obedience of the offerers. God desires a relationship with His people, not a religion of empty worship. The Israelites would offer everything (even what God forbade) except what he really desired – their love and their obedience.

Verse eight is Micah's reply to the questions of the previous two verses. It is probably the best-known statement in the whole book:

***Micah 6:8*** *He has told you, O man, 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?*

Again, God does not desire meaningless worship. He does not want His people to merely go through the motions of "doing church." God's answer to what He requires of us is threefold:

- 1) Act Justly
- 2) Love Mercy
- 3) Walk Humbly with God

### **Act Justly (Do What is Right)**

To act justly is important. It does not mean talking about justice or to get other people to act justly. It means to do the right thing yourself. Oftentimes we focus on what we think other people ought to do, how they have treated us, how they need to act justly, how they need to act rightly. God's Word calls us to inspect our own lives and for us to do what is right. Sometimes, what is right is not what is easy or desirable. Sometimes, to do the right thing we have to put aside our own desires and "think of others more highly than ourselves." (Rom. 12:3)

### **Love Mercy (Show Constant Love)**

There are several variations on the second statement. Some translations render it "love kindness," others "love faithfulness." Probably the most common is to "love mercy." Micah probably means, however, for us to *show constant love*. In verses three through five, God had accused His people of failing in their covenant obligations to Him. To show constant love refers to our loyalty to God, to love Him faithfully. But it also implies steadfast love and kindness with one another, since this is one of the obvious ways by which we show our relationship with God. Jesus told His disciples that it was by their love for one another that the world would know that they were His disciples. That is true for us today: if we love one another, the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus. If we do not love one another, and are not willing to demonstrate that love at all costs, what does that say about us?

### **Walk Humbly with God**

The last requirement in Micah's response is to walk humbly with God. This probably means humble in the sense of not insisting on one's own way but doing what God desires. This can be very difficult to do since by nature we want to do what we want and to have what we want. How many conflicts in church are the result of people wanting what they want or trying to control the outcome of something? Probably all of them! We must be very careful to live the way God wants us to live – to live humbly, to live faithfully, and to live obediently to our Father in Heaven.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, Micah's point is that the outward forms of religion should reflect our inner relationship with God. Without this relationship all religion is useless. Justice, love, and faithfulness are essential qualities of the Christian life. We must do these to do what God requires of us. However, we have to be careful to apply this passage correctly to our lives. Micah is not saying that doing rightly, loving faithfully, and living our lives the way God wants us to live will save us or make us right with Him. The gospel is still true, Jesus Christ is still the Savior, and it is still through Him and only Him that we are declared right with God. What Micah wrote here should be the natural consequence of people who have been saved by the grace of God and have been forgiven of their sin. Treating one another fairly, loving each other faithfully, and doing the things that God desires should merely be a natural outflow of a changed life.

So, maybe the question you should ask yourself is this: Do you see evidence of a life changing faith in your life? Do you harbor resentment and unforgiveness to others? Are you unrepentant of some sin that you have done? Do you extend mercy and grace to others just as God has extended to you? Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to be at peace with one another as far as it depends upon you? What God desires of us, what He demands of us is heartfelt obedience and love to Him and to each other. Where we have failed to do that, we need to humbly come before Him and pray for change. God is not interested in our meaningless worship but rather desires a humble, loving, and obedient people to be His church. Are you willing to do that? May it be so! Amen!