

**November 19, 2017**

Micah 6:1-8

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One great challenge in parenting is teaching children to get along. Brothers and sisters have amazing ability to get on one another's nerves. Sometimes they act like best buddies. You can look out your back yard window and see them playing harmoniously on the play structure or making a snow man together. Other times you look out your back window to see one sibling trapped inside the play structure with other siblings keeping them there as prisoner. Or instead of making a snow man together, one sibling tries to put the other sibling inside the snow man.

Now I'm sure nothing like that ever happened in your family. I remember having to teach our kids things like "No, you may not to wrap a cord around your brother's neck and see if he'll choke." Or "It's not okay to take your little sister and wrap her up in blankets so she can't move and then push her around in a laundry basket." Sometimes, after we saved the life of the particular child under threat that day, we would teach or more often force our children to say sorry. Most of the time they obliged us with the obligatory "sorry" while giving the death stare to their sibling the second we looked away.

Most of us probably had similar training from our parents as we grew up. But as we grow into teenage, young adult and adult years, we still need to work at getting along. Most people here probably can think of one or more person we struggle to get along with. We have to decide what we will do about the relationship especially with those closest to us. Broken relationships need restoration if we're going to get along. The same is true in our relationship with God. Sometimes it's close, sometimes it's strained.

Today, we are going to follow a conversation about a broken relationship between God and His people. God will initiate the process of restoring the relationship. As He does this, He reveals ways His people, like you and me, can maintain a good relationship with Him. If we will follow these ways, we can contribute to worship that pleases Him. After all, worship is vital to our relationship with God. If we're not engaged in appropriate worship, we will not be in a good relationship with God. So we will learn some ways that contribute to healthy God pleasing worship.

I also hope you will be reminded of how God has reached out to you at different points in your life.

This is all found in a message from another, a Minor Prophet in the OT. We spent several messages with Amos, the prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah. He confronted the northern Israelites about their worship because they

worshipped intensely but wrongly. They had a wrong understanding of God and lived lives that didn't back up their worship.

Then we met Hosea. When God called him to publicly portray the broken relationship between God and the people. Hosea married an unfaithful wife to remind the Israelites of their unfaithfulness to God. Yet, God would reach out in a pursuing persistent love.

Now we come to Micah. He was a prophet who lived in the southern kingdom. He prophesied there after the fall of northern kingdom. Yet the people of the southern kingdom followed the unfaithful worship and living patterns of their northern neighbors. So Micah served as God's messenger to call them back before it was too late. In one of his messages, we discover these 3 everyday ways to contribute to worship that pleases God and to restore and maintaining healthy relationships.

So its found in Micah 6:1-8. Don't be shy to look it up in the table of contents of your Bibles if you need to. It's on page 876 of my Bible which doesn't help you at all if you don't have the exact same Bible I have. But it is on page 661 in the Bibles in front of you. Or you can find it on your devices. Micah 6:1-8 reading from the English Standard Version.

### **Micah 6:1-8 (ESV)**

**6** Hear what the LORD says:

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

<sup>2</sup>Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth,  
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.

<sup>3</sup>"O my people, what have I done to you?  
How have I wearied you? Answer me!

<sup>4</sup>For I brought you up from the land of Egypt  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam.

<sup>5</sup>O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,  
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened 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 myself before God on high?  
 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 thousands of rivers of oil?  
 Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
 the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”  
<sup>8</sup>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?

Commentators notice that this passage seems to be structured around the word “what.” I count 8 occurrences in 8 verses. It is a question & answer conversation where each party asks a question to try to gain some clarity. So I’m going to follow the “whats” through the passage to get us to those 3 every day ways to maintain our relationship with God and with others.

### **God - What have I done to you (6:1-3)?**

God declares the first “what” question after He initiates a serious conversation. It looks like He’s taking Israel to court. Notice the language of the court in the first verses. “Plead your case. Hear the indictment. The Lord has an indictment or charge to make against His people”. There is something wrong in their relationship. So the Lord calls witnesses. Verse 1 – “Arise, plead your case before the mountains and let the hills hear your voice.” Mountains and hills dominate the eastern half of Israel. Those mountains and hills existed throughout Israel’s history. They would have seen all that happened. If they could talk, they would affirm the Lord’s charge against the people. God registers His complaint. God is the prosecutor. The people are the defendants. The mountains and hills serve as witnesses. You’d think that the next step would be the reading of the charges against Israel.

But in verse 3 the Lord suddenly shows compassion. He appeals to His people with love and asks “O my people, what have I done to you?” Instead of launching into accusation the Lord invites conversation. If you want to actually address a broken relationship, one way to start is to invite discussion. Immediately accusing another will naturally lead to a defensive response. But a question invites reflection and discussion.

The Lord's question identifies that there is an issue. There is something wrong. Some breach has occurred that begs the question. The Lord follows up "what have I done to you" with "How have I wearied you?" What has to have happened for the Lord to ask such a question? Well, it seems the people complained about a burdensome relationship with the Lord. It seems like whenever He approaches, they roll their eyes or sigh deeply or give Him the cold shoulder. It's like they are irritated by His presence. You may have experienced such tension in a relationship, when someone treats you like an irritation or intrusion.

So the Lord asks these questions as an invitation to begin discussing the breach in their relationship. But no one answers. You know when you try to talk with someone about what's bothering them and they say "nothing," when you know there is something? It seems a little like that here. The Lord asks for an answer but there is none.

So He decides to provide an answer to His own question. He moves from asking "What have I done *to you*" to "What *I have done for you*."

#### **God - What I have done for you. (6:4-5)**

Verses 4 and 5 bring up four examples of the Lord's action on behalf of the people. **First, He rescued them from slavery.** "I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery." The people groaned in Egypt under the oppressive treatment of the slave drivers for 430 years. But the Lord intervened to rescue them out of the iron fist of that great nation by the 10 plagues.

**Second, He provided great leaders.** "I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam." The Exodus account tells us they were a sister and two brothers. Aaron and Miriam were born first. Moses was born during a time when the Pharaoh grew concerned about the rapid population growth of the Israelites. So he sanctions the killing of all Hebrew baby boys 2 years old and younger, Moses should have been one of them. Moses' mother hid him as a baby in a basket in the reeds along the edge of the Nile River. One of Pharaoh's daughters comes along and finds him. Moses' sister Miriam is watching and bravely steps forward to rescue her brother. Later, Miriam leads the Israelite women in a victory song after the crossing of the Red Sea. Aaron becomes the high priest of the nation. Moses becomes the deliverer and law-giver. None of them are perfect. Yet God works with and through them to accomplish His great salvation work for the nation. Perhaps in bringing these three to mind, the Israelites would plainly see the weakness of their own leaders.

**Third, He turned an intended cursing into blessing.** While Israel moved towards the Promised Land, a king named Balak hired a seer name Balaam to curse Israel. But Balaam announces he will only say what the Lord reveals to him. Instead of cursing, Balaam blesses Israel. .

Fourth, the Lord reminds them that **He brought them safely across the Jordan River into the Promised Land.** The Jordan River presented a serious problem for any army to cross. Yet the Lord helped them. They not only to get to the other side but conquered the land.

Through these reminders, the Lord displays His ongoing faithfulness to their relationship. He kept covenant with them. He remained faithful. At the end of verse 5, He concludes the list with the phrase “so that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.” These acts were not merely coming to the aid of God’s people but His righteousness in maintaining faithfulness to His covenant promise.” When we have a strained relationship with God we need to recall all God has done in our lives that shows His faithfulness to us. His faithfulness in the past testifies to His faithfulness today and into our future.

So God invites discussion by asking “what has He done”. Then He shows what He has done. Finally, the people respond. Or God inspires Micah to take the posture of a response from a worshipper. He also asks a “what” question.

**Worshipper – With what shall I come before the Lord? (6:6-7)** And bow myself before God on high. This is God of the heights or God in heaven. How do we reach God in heaven? How can mortal humans relate to the immortal God Most High?

The worshipper propose possible answers. In them, he reveals the problem in his approach. He seems to be frustrated that the Lord has not responded to his worship. He has not received what he wanted from the Lord. He has worshipped but the Lord has not accepted.

So almost in exasperation or maybe with some of the weariness, the worshipper wonders, “what will it take to get the Lord to respond? Would **burnt offerings** do it? These regular offerings were brought by any worshipper. But they were the *burnt* offerings which meant complete burning up on the altar. Nothing was left for the worshipper. Some offerings allowed you to burn only a portion and then share the rest with your family and friends. Burnt offerings cost the worshipper a lot. Yet there seemed to be no response from God.

What about **year old calves**? These were apparently the choicest offerings. Think about how costly it would have been to sacrifice a year old calf. They are just entering the age of productivity. To offer such a calf would cost the worshipper a lot. But this also did not seem to generate a good response from God.

Then the exasperation or frustrated heart of the worshipper explodes. Will the Lord be pleased with **thousands of rams**? Only the king could really offer such a sacrifice. What about **10000 rivers of oil**, a valuable commodity in an overwhelming abundance. Yet neither of these generate a response from God. So the worshipper concludes by pondering perhaps the most valuable item in his life in that society – **his firstborn child**. Would this finally get the Lord's attention?

But there is something wrong with these questions. The worshipper seems to think God cares most about the size or cost of the gifts. He acts like God needs a bribe before He will respond. Or maybe he thinks that giving an offering obligates God to respond. And after the transaction occurs, the worshippers can just go back to living his life however he wants. But God has not care more about the externals of worship.

So God answers. **God - I have shown you what is good and what I require (6:8)** Here we discover 3 everyday ways we can respond to God and fuel appropriate worship of Him. "I have already showed you what is good. It has been consistently communicated to you throughout history by Moses and by the prophets and in the Scriptures. And what do I require of you"?

**To do justice.** What does that mean? **To make right decisions according to God's moral standards.** Act on behalf of someone weaker. When we're in a socially superior position to someone because of our job, finances, familiarity, knowledge, language, popularity, physical strength or whatever else elevates us above someone else, a person doing justice will step in on behalf of the weaker.

This requires us to stop attempts by others who try to take what is not theirs from the weak. It means we stop inhuman treatment. We stop others who selfishly cheat others to enhance their own financial position. Doing justice calls me to be personally just and stop others from acting unjustly. Israel's leaders failed to do that. Instead, they participated in and spread the injustice.

Many of you are doing justice by supporting a – sponsor child; loaning or gifting funds or materials to those in need. We can stop by the side of the road to help someone in need. For me it sometimes requires me to step away from group conversations and finding someone alone or isolated and intently listening to them. Do justice at work – with

employees; employers; coworkers. We are called to do justice at school – to speak up and stop oppression happening to a sibling or a friend.

The second way we do what's required by the Lord is **to love mercy**. This means **to help, with a spirit of joy and generosity, those in a weaker position with no ability to repay**. God constantly shows us mercy with joy. We respond by joyfully showing mercy to others. So it can look like justice but it's the attitude that's important. We love showing kindness to a beggar on the side of the road with a donation; clothing to someone living on the street; sharing our lunch or sandwich with someone who doesn't have or visiting a person who cannot get out one too sick to get up. We love spending time with a child or tween who has some problems at home; visit people in hospital; helping out in Rainbow or Prism to families in need.; Help your spouse, child, parent or sibling when they are in need. We love mercy. We love kindness.

The third way we do what the Lord requires is to **Walk Humbly with your God**. The first two commands focused on our relationship with others. This one focuses on God. It describes **an everyday commitment to bring your life into conformity with God's will**. It requires submitting our will to His. It warns against carelessly doing things our own way, instead of being attentive to do God's way. This requirement governs doing justice & loving mercy. If we do walk humbly with God, we will certainly do justice and love mercy.

Now think about the relationship between God and the worshipper. God has already described what He has done for the people. Imagine His heart response to a worshipper who walks humbly with Him – and does justice and loves showing mercy to others? God would accept and respond to worship offered by someone who lived like that. That kind of worshipper has been worshipping God all week with his or her life.

**What does this have to do with worship? To worship in a way that pleases God, we must live justly, mercifully and humbly by the power of Christ.** That last phrase (by the power of Christ) deals with a potential mis-application of this passage. Some might read Micah 6:8 and conclude this is an alternative way to salvation. As long as we're involved in justice, mercy and humility, we have met the Lord's requirements. We are good with God. We don't even have to be part of a church. But the justice required is justice according to God's standards. Which is perfect justice. Nor can we love consistently kindness apart from the presence of Christ in our lives. We naturally don't love kindness. We naturally love ourselves even at the expense of others. We naturally want to put ourselves higher than others.

We don't naturally want to walk humbly before our God on our own. We want to walk proudly before Him & be on top of the world. We like to think we are masters of our own destiny and can do whatever we want to do. But as we grow and mature in Christ, we begin to realize and accept that the way up is the way down – that whoever wants to be great among you must be a servant. We see that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

The only person who lived this out perfectly was Jesus. We begin to move towards this with Jesus in our lives. The more we see ourselves not only doing what the Lord requires wanting to do them, the more we see evidence of our salvation. So I would view these "requirements" more as evidence that we are cooperating with the Spirit's work in our. We can only begin approaching such a life with the Spirit in us. This is only possible through Christ's death and trusting our lives to Him.

Just as God reached out to Israel, God has reached out to us. Like He rescued Israel from slavery He rescued us from sin's slavery through the cross. He sent people into our lives to lead and guide us. He turned the curses over us into blessings. He has walked with us through every Jordan we've had to cross. He calls us to respond to His faithfulness by walking humbly with Him. Then with the power we receive from that communion with the Lord, we do justice and love mercy. Such a life worships God everyday and prepares us for appropriate corporate worship of God.

And remember those relationships in your life that may need restoration? How would you respond if the other person walked humbly with God, showed mercy and did justice? What would that mean if they faced the difficulties in the relationship and confessed their injustice towards you? Most of us would respond positively to that. We can't control what they might do. But we can come to God and walk humbly with Him to learn what He calls us to do in those relationships.

He has showed you O men & women what is good & what the Lord requires. He has already done much for you. Will you begin or continue to walk humbly with Him as you seek His will for your life? From His wisdom and strength, go out and do justice and love mercy.