

Minor Prophets

Three Simple Rules

Frankton – 1/17/16

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8 justice, mercy, walk humbly

Proposition: Christianity cannot be the coat you wear, it must be the rhythm in your heart and the movement of your thoughts.

This little passage of scripture first reminds us somewhat of a courtroom scene. There is a trial going on between God and his people. God starts this trial by telling Israel to first state its case against him. He asks them, with the mountains as witnesses, what he has done to make the people turn away from him. God knew that he had kept his promises to the people so he knew they didn't have a case against him. So hearing the deafening silence from the people, God sets out stating his case against them. Starting in verse 5, he reminds the people what he had done for them. He reminds them of four things: 1) the Exodus, 2) God causing Balaam to bless the Israelites, [NMB 22-24], 3) Acacia, the last camp before coming into the Promised Land, where the people received God's instructions on how to live, and 4) Gilgal, the first campsite in the Promised Land, where the people renewed their covenant with God. By reminding the people of these stories, God was reminding the nation of how much he loved them and how he actively cared.

Then the people, convinced of their guilt, finally get involved in verses 6-7. Now if you read this with a little imagination, these verses read like four people who are terrified of what's going to happen next and they are desperately trying to come up with something to change the verdict. The first person says, "I think we're supposed to bring something to God." The second one remembers, "I remember now, we are supposed to bring sacrifices to God." The third one suggests, "I know, let's bring lots of sacrifices to God. Maybe that will work." (Apparently to appease a very angry God). And finally the fourth person suggests, "Other people sacrifice children and their god likes it so let's try that." Panic seems to have set in. They are grasping at any straw they can find to appease God and alleviate any punishment that might be coming their way.

Finally in verse 8, Micah gives us the famous line with three things that the Israelites, and by extension any of us who are God's followers, need to do. We are: **[SLIDE]** to do justice (some translations say to do what is right), to love mercy (some translations say kindness), and to walk humbly with our God. I've heard these three simple rules called Micah's Law.

The first simple rule is that we are to **[SLIDE]** do justice, or to do what is right. I want you to hear what I just said; we are to DO justice. It's not enough to read about it. It's not enough to want it. It's not enough to pray for it – although that's a good thing. We must DO justice. Anything less than doing justice is unacceptable. The word DO is a verb – an action word. It means we have to get off our blessed assurances, which unfortunately maybe our best sides, and perform some task. Talk is cheap and the cheap talk, doing is much more difficult and only the truly committed do. Do-ing requires action – not just thinking about it, not just hoping it will come about and not just planning for it. You can plan all you want and if you never actually DO anything, nothing changes. Remember: the smallest deed done is better than the grandest intention left undone. DO something. Do what is right; do justice

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Doing justice seems easy enough. We've all watched some TV shows about justice. There's CSI and its clones and NCIS and its clones and all the other cop/law enforcement shows. We all know what that kind of justice is like. As a society, we want the guilty punished and the innocent reimbursed for their losses. We want the guilty behind bars and the innocent sipping iced tea out on the veranda. What I've described is retributive justice. That's where we make sure the bad guy pays for their crime and gets locked away from society so they can't hurt anyone else. That's justice in the legal sense.

But there is another side of justice. Justice has a distributive side. And I think that's the side that God thinks about most. Distributive justice is making sure that each person has enough of what they need to live their life. Distributive justice is making sure that all people have the basics in life in order to have a life. We try and do distributive justice in this church. We take up collections of money for folks and organizations who need money. We collect food and other items and distribute it to people and organizations who need it. And those are good things.

Our collections and giving money is all good as far as it goes but it comes up short in two areas. Number one: it's easy to give things to people and still not really get involved. We can reach into our pockets and give money or we can grab our checkbooks and write a check or we can go to the store and buy something for a collection. Those are pretty easy things to do. It's so much harder to give our time because that requires us to give ourselves. But to really make a difference, to really mean something, we need to take the next step and give ourselves. We need to give our time. Volunteer for charity work, find a soup kitchen, visit the nursing homes, or go see patients in the hospital.

Number two, our collections and giving money don't make the problem of unequal distribution go away. They are Band-Aid fixes. Several years ago there was a singer named Harry Chapin. Harry wrote some strange songs – "30,000 Pounds of Bananas" being one of them. One story he tells is about a middle school principal whose school had taken up a Thanksgiving collection of food for several families in the area. On Wednesday afternoon before Thanksgiving he came over the PA system and said something like this, "Children, we are all just amazed at the response to our collection. We have collected more food than we ever have in the past. And not just a little more food, thanks to your kindness we are going to be able to help ten more families eat a wonderful Thanksgiving Day dinner than we expected. And that is just great. There's only one problem and I want you to think about it over Thanksgiving and talk about it in your classes when we get back on Monday. And this is the problem: what are these same families going to eat next week?" That's the short fall of just giving money and time – it doesn't make the problem go away; it's a band-aid for a broken leg.

So what do we need to do to fix the problem? We need to turn to the next of Micah's three simple rules. We need to [SLIDE] love mercy, or as a lot of translations say to love kindness. I want to give you a definition of mercy. [SLIDE] Mercy is justice with love added. Mercy isn't just giving someone less punishment than they deserve. Mercy is giving someone more love than they deserve. We aren't going to fix the problem of unequal distribution of goods and resources until we truly care for those who have less. We can keep giving them food and clothes, etc., but we will not fix the problem until we truly care for them because when we truly care for someone, that's when we do our best work.

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I'm not standing up here and saying that you can fix the world's food shortage problem. There are things in our lives that we just can't do. As an example, I enjoy Purdue football. But I am smart enough to realize that I will never be able to play football for Purdue. Too old, too slow, too short, too fat. (Sounds like a Dr. Seuss book.) But there are other things I can do to support Purdue football. I can go to the games and cheer with the best of them. I can sing when the band plays "Hail! Hail, to old Purdue". I can wear my black and gold to the games. I can yell at the officials helping them to realize that have missed a call. I can buy a hot dog and a coke at the game to support the concessions. I can even turn the office in the parsonage into what I affectionately call my Purdue room where I have a lot of my Purdue mementos. So, there are other things I can do to support the football team besides playing football.

So not being able to do some things shouldn't discourage us from doing other things. That same principle works with kindness and mercy, too. [SLIDE] Just because we can't do everything doesn't mean we don't do anything. Have any of you heard the phrase: random acts of kindness? I challenge you to do random acts of kindness. Today when you go to Rachel's for a little Christian conferencing in order to figure out how you can take today's wonderful sermon and put it into action, try finding some random act of kindness to do. For instance you might pick up the bill for the table next to you. Or maybe you can give the waitress a tip that's equal to the size of your bill. Maybe you could offer to baby-sit a child so that mom and dad can have a little time for themselves. Maybe it's just as simple as offering a kind word to someone who needs it. I don't know what random act of kindness you can do. You have now been blessed to go out and act randomly and kindly.

Now we come to the last of Micah three simple rules – [SLIDE] to walk humbly with your God. So how do we walk humbly with our God? I think it means to live by faith. Let God be God and for us to just be us. We should have faith that God is the omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient being that he his and he loves us more than we will ever know. I think faith is the antithesis of pride. Pride seeks to put the proudful first. Humility, puts God first by realizing that we are not God, God is. I said it last week, I'm going to say it again. It's not about you, it's about God. Remembering that will help us walk humbly with our God

As always, I was reading one of the commentaries as I was preparing this sermon and one of the writers said that he felt that to walk humbly with your God was to walk comfortably with your God. You see, I could walk beside God with fear in my heart remembering all the power that God has and all of my failures and that at God's very word my life could be snuffed out by a legion of angels riding on white stallions or by just a puff of smoke and a few ashes left on the ground. But that would be forgetting that God wants the very best for me and he came to this earth to die my death so that I could live forever with him. I could walk beside God with my head held high in the air and with my chest all puffed out just as full of myself and my accomplishments as I could be. But that would be forgetting that it was God who created everything in this universe, including me, while there is nothing that I can create that doesn't use something that God has already provided. I could walk beside God just as mad as a wet hen that God is making me walk beside him. But that would be forgetting that God forgives all my sins – even anger. I could walk beside God envious of all the attention he is getting while I am walking in relative obscurity. But that would be forgetting that God wants to share everything he has with me. I could do all those things, but I should walk beside God humbly, with my head bowed in adoration, remembering that God loves me.

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We've now talked about the three simple rules from Micah. [SLIDE] I think we all know that living these three simple rules is really hard; practically impossible without God's help. Realistically, they are impossible without God's help. We know that people are like water, which will take the easiest path from Point A to Point B. If it was easy to live following these three simple rules then the Israelites of Micah's time would have been doing it before Micah had even said anything about it. If it was easy, then we would be living it today, and we know that we aren't. You see, for us it is easier not to do these things. It's easier to sit back in our living rooms and cocoon ourselves from the world and think that we're doing the right thing when we just read our Bible and pray.

However, I think what Micah was trying to say was that we can't really be followers of God, we can't be walking beside him if we have all of this knowledge about what we are supposed to do and just leave it in our head. We have to move our knowledge from our head to our heart and embrace it just as God embraces us. You see, if you know something, you don't own it, but if you love something, you live it. I don't want you to just know justice; I want you to love justice and live justice. I don't want you to just know mercy; I want you to love mercy and live mercy. I don't want you to know about walking humbly with God; I want you to love walking humbly with God and live walking humbly with your God.