

Living Justly, with Grace and Humility

Reading: Micah 6:8 “...What does the Lord require of you....”

Introduction:

To put the reading into its context.....

Micah was a prophet in Judah during the reign of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah¹, kings of Judah. These kings reigned during the period approximately 750 to 687 BC² – about 100 years before Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed Jerusalem.

Jeremiah refers to Micah as being around during Hezekiah’s reign – approx 728 to 686 BC² (**Jeremiah 26:18**).

Jotham and Hezekiah were generally good kings in the religious sense (**2 Kings 15:32-34; 18:1-3**), but Ahaz did evil (**2 Kings 16:1-4**). The country had a history of being unfaithful to the Lord over the years, and Hezekiah introduced some reforms to get rid of idolatry (**2 Kings 18:4**). However, the people themselves didn’t seem to change – they were still corrupt;

- **Micah 2:1-2** some were devising evil schemes to steal people’s property.
- **Micah 3:1-3** the rulers showed no mercy or justice towards the people.
- **Micah 3:5** the prophets lead the people astray.
- **Micah 3:11** the judges took bribes.

Because of this, God is going to inflict punishment on the people (**Micah 1:1-16**)

In chapter **6:6-7**, Micah then asks some rhetorical questions;

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God ?

Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old³ ?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil ?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ?”

Now while the sacrifices were a requirement of the Old Law (e.g. read the first few chapters of **Leviticus**), what God really wants is this;

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you

But to do justly

To love mercy

And to walk humbly with your God⁴.” (**Micah 6:8**)

This is one of those verses that you sometimes find in scripture that describes in “a nut shell” what God requires of us. (**Ecclesiastes 12:13; John 14:15** and **1 John 4:11** are similar passages.). While this verse was written in an Old Testament context, it contains principles that apply to us today (**Titus 1:8** “*just*”; **James 3:17** “*full of mercy*”; **James 4:10** “*humble yourselves*”). In one way or another, each of these three things (mentioned in **Micah 6:8**) have a direct impact on our

¹ See **Micah 1:1**.

² Dates are approximate only, as different commentators have slightly different dates.

³ **Leviticus 9:3** “*first year*” animal sacrifices – see also **Leviticus 23:18; Numbers 7**.

⁴ Note the general similarity with what is taught in **1 Samuel 15:22**.

Living Justly, with Grace and Humility

relationship with other people. And our relationship with other people - how we treat them - is important, because it has an impact on how God deals with us;
– e.g. **Matthew 5:7; 6:14-15; 7:2; 25:31-46; James 2:13; 1 Peter 3:7**

1) Living Justly

Being “*just*” is described in one dictionary⁵ as “*giving proper consideration to the claims of everybody involved*”. In other words, considering all sides of an argument, and making an objective judgement or decision based on all of the facts and evidence, rather than one based on personal biases or prejudices. When it comes to moral, ethical or religious issues, it includes taking into account what God has to say on the matter.

When someone is described as being “*just*” in the scriptures (both in the Old and New Testaments⁶), it means that they are “*holy, equitable, righteous*”, i.e. they are someone who strives to keep sin out of their lives; someone who does what is right, regardless of the circumstances.

One example from the Old Testament of someone who is described as being “*just*” is Lot. Now he had his failings like everybody else (**Romans 3:23**) – for example, his choice of city in which to live was questionable (**Genesis 14:11-12; 18:20-21; 19:1 f.f.**). But he is described in **2 Peter 2:7** as being “*just*” – or “*righteous*”, depending on your Bible translation. An example of his “*just-ness*” (or righteousness) with regards toward others is shown in the stand he took to protect the two angels who came to Sodom.

When you read **Genesis 19:1-11**, you get a picture of the sin and evil that prevailed in the city. **2 Peter 2:8** tells us that the sin that existed in that city “*..tormented his righteous soul from day to day by (his) seeing and hearing their lawless deeds...*”. What he saw and heard the people of the city doing caused him distress. But despite the fact that he was surrounded by sin and wickedness, Lot held fast to what was right.

When the two angels came, he extended hospitality to them, and insisted that they didn’t spend the night in the open square (**Genesis 19:1-3**). Later that evening, the men of the city, both young and old, came from every section of the city and surrounded Lot’s house (vs. **4**). And there is no doubt about what their intentions were (vs.**5**).

This would have been a very frightening and intimidating situation. There was no “000” number that you can call for help - you were on your own. From a physical perspective, the “easy” thing that Lot could have done would have been to simply hand the angels over to the mob and hope that the crowd would go away. But Lot knew that that wasn’t the right thing to do. Rather, with the angels behind him in his house, Lot went out to face the crowd, and shut the door behind him (vs.**6**). From there, he pleaded with the crowd to “*..not do so wickedly...*” (vs.**7**). But his pleading had no effect, and the crowd “*pressed hard against him*” (vs.**9**). He was literally face to face with an evil, angry mob. Finally, the angels themselves rescued Lot from the crowd. But the point is this:

⁵ The Australian Secondary Dictionary, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986.

⁶ Strong’s Concordance, Hebrew word number 6662, Greek word number 1342.

Living Justly, with Grace and Humility

Lot knew that what the crowd wanted to do to the angels⁷ was wrong, and despite the very intimidating circumstances, he was prepared to put himself in harm's way in order to do what was right to protect his guests⁸.

We read of others throughout scripture who were described as “just”;

- Noah – in spite of all the evil and corruption that surrounded him, he “*..walked with God*” (**Genesis 6:9**)
- Joseph, Mary's husband – he wanted to protect Mary from any public shame regarding her pregnancy out of wedlock (**Matthew 1:18-19**)
- Joseph of Arimathea, a council member – he did not agree with the council's decision to crucify Jesus, and went openly to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus (**Luke 23:50-52**).

Application: There can be times when we, as individuals, will face situations where we have to make a choice between doing what is right, or just “*going with the flow*”, when “*going with the flow*” is not the right way to go. It may be something at work, or at home, or maybe something in our social life, or even in our church life. It can relate to situations where;

- people may be unfairly treating someone else, or,
- things are constantly said that are not true, or,
- we may be asked to do something that is not right.

As Christians, we are called upon to live justly, righteously (**Titus 2:12**). We are to be lights to the world (**Matthew 5:14-16**). If we try to compromise what is right in order to blend in with the world, then we lose our effectiveness as being “lights”. Now **Ecclesiastes 3:7b** tells us that there is “*...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak...*”. But there are times where, out of self preservation, we do the former, when we should be doing the latter. To live justly, to live righteously, sometimes requires us to stick our necks out in taking a stand for what is right.⁹

2) Showing Mercy

One publication¹⁰ described “mercy” as “*compassionate treatment, especially of those under one's power.... A disposition to be kind and forgiving*”. The publication went on to say that the most common Greek word translated “mercy” means “*kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them*”.

The greatest example of mercy is what God has shown towards us. Because of our own sins, we deserve to be condemned by God (**Romans 3:23; 6:23a**) – we deserve to be cast into the “*...lake which burns with fire*” (**Revelation 21:8**). In

⁷ There is no indication that Lot knew at that point that the visitors were angels with miraculous powers.

⁸ Lot's offering of his daughters should not be seen as condoning rape. While we are not specifically told of his rationale for offering them to the crowd (other than to protect the angels), perhaps he considered that, if the crowd was intent on doing evil anyway, then the crowd's treating the visitors in such a shameful way and knowing them carnally was the worse of two evils, bringing greater condemnation upon themselves – consider **Leviticus 20:13** against **Deuteronomy 22:28-29**.

⁹ If we don't think that taking a stand is important, consider **Proverbs 25:26**.

¹⁰ Truth for Today, The Beatitudes, May 2008, page 27.

Living Justly, with Grace and Humility

Romans 1:29-31 we see a list of sins, some of which (I'm sure that) we are guilty of ourselves, and verse **32** says that "*such things are deserving of death*".

But while God is a just God (**Revelation 15:3**) and His judgements are true (**Psalms 19:9b**), He is also a God of love and mercy. He shows mercy towards those who obey Him (**Psalms 86:5; Ephesians 2:4; Hebrews 8:12**). For those who have obeyed the gospel (and continue faithfully in it), they are no longer condemned (**Romans 8:1**) – they are now deemed as being holy and blameless in God's sight (**Colossians 1:21-23a**).

- we should also note that those who do not obey God can expect no mercy from Him – **Romans 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8**.

For us, **Luke 6:36** says, "*Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father is also merciful*". But how can we show mercy in a practical way? What situations can we face that give us the opportunity to be merciful? Let's consider two areas;

a) Forgiveness of others

When people sin against us, we can be hurt – sometimes badly hurt. One of our responses can be to "get even", to retaliate – they have hurt us, so we want to hurt them in return, either by us doing something back to them, or by getting others to do it for us. We feel that they need to suffer because of what they have done to us.

But throughout scripture, we see God showing forgiveness towards those who have sinned, but have a contrite heart. To those who acknowledge their sin before God and repent, God extends His mercy (**Psalms 51:1-4, 17; 2 Samuel 12:13; Jonah 3:10; Acts 2:38**). .

We are to forgive others in the same manner that God has forgiven us (**Ephesians 4:32**). We are to be like God (**Matthew 5:48**) – the way that He shows mercy and forgives us is the pattern, the example, that we should follow. Consider, then, how God has forgiven you. Consider the shameful and embarrassing ways that you have sinned against God in the past. And consider how you want Him to be merciful and forgiving towards you (**Psalms 51:1**).

We can receive benefits by having a merciful and forgiving attitude towards others. **Proverbs 11:17** says; "*The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh*". But at the end of the day, showing mercy and forgiveness is not primarily about us, it is about the other person (**1 Corinthians 13:5** "... (love) *does not seek its own...*"). It is not about us being "vindicated" or getting recompense. It is about the spiritual welfare of the other person¹¹.

- this seems to be the lesson that Jonah had to learn after God had forgiven the city of Nineveh (**Jonah 4:1-11**)

b) Benevolence towards others

We don't live in a perfect world. There will always be people in some sort of need (**John 12:8**). They may be in that situation because of their own bad decisions, or maybe through no fault of their own. But throughout scripture, we see the exhortation for us to do what we can to help others;

¹¹ Consider this: Does God forgive us for His benefit? or for our benefit?

Living Justly, with Grace and Humility

- **Matthew 5:44** “...do good to those who hate you....”
- **Luke 10:25-37** *Parable of the good Samaritan.*
- **Romans 12:13** “...distributing to the needs of the saints...”
- **Romans 12:20** “...If your enemy is hungry, feed him....”
- **Galatians 6:10** “...as we have opportunity....”
- **James 1:27a** “...visit orphans and widows in their trouble...”
- **1 John 3:17** “...whoever has the world’s goods....”

Notice from some of the above scriptures that our mercy and compassion are not to be limited to just those who are our friends and brethren. We may give our brethren extra attention (**Galatians 6:10b; 1 Peter 1:22**), but our mercy and compassion is to extend to even those who may be described as being our “enemy”.

- even God sends the rain on the just and the unjust (**Matthew 5:45**)

In order to show true mercy, we need to have hearts that are sensitive to the needs of others. We often see in scripture that Jesus was “*moved with compassion*” when He saw the lost, the sick and the helpless (**Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 20:34**).

But we need more than simply hearts that can be “*moved with compassion*” – we need hands that will do what needs to be done. The lesson from **James 2:15-16** is that while it is good to feel sorry for someone in need, there also needs to be the actions as well. Jesus was not simply “*moved with compassion*”, He did what He could – He healed the sick (**Matthew 14:14**), He restored the sight to the blind (**Matthew 20:34**), and He taught those who were lost (**Mark 10:1; Luke 19:9-10**).

We need to be merciful, not just in word, but also in deed (**1 John 3:18**).

3) Being Humble

“Humility” has been described as being “*the state or quality of being lowly in mind, unassuming, meek, unpretending, or modest*”¹². For most of us, humility is not a natural quality. Our natural inclination is to look after “number one” first, and consider others second. But as children of God, humility is something that we are commanded to have (**1 Peter 5:6**) – it is something that each of us need to work at.

In **Philippians 2:3-4** we read;

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

What are these verses saying ? They are saying that;

- firstly, our motivation for doing things should not be “*What’s in it for me?*”
- secondly, we need to consider others as being better than ourselves, and,
- thirdly, while we need to look after ourselves, we also need to look out for the interests of others.

¹² Attitudes 1, Virgil Leach, 1979, “Humility”, page 75

Living Justly, with Grace and Humility

The next few verses (in **Philippians 2**) show an example of humility that was for our benefit.

Each one of us had a great spiritual need – we were lost, helpless, because of our sins (**Romans 3:23; 6:23**) God could have said; “*You have sinned. You have brought condemnation upon yourselves – it’s your own fault.*”

But God doesn’t want anybody to perish (**2 Peter 3:9**). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, *i.e.* to suffer under His wrath (**Hebrews 10:31**). But the only way for us to be saved was for Christ to die for us (**Hebrews 10:4; 1 Timothy 1:15**). Jesus put us first. He gave up the glory of being in Heaven with the Father. He humbled Himself and came to earth to live as a man, and allowed others to crucify Him on a cross so that we could be saved (**Isaiah 53:4-5; Romans 5:6; Philippians 2:5-8**).

Having humility doesn’t mean that we are worthless, or that we are not important in God’s eyes. Rather, it is a preparedness to take a step down, or to make a sacrifice, in order to serve another – for their benefit. It also prevents us from thinking more highly of ourselves that we ought to think (**Romans 12:3**).

- ego and pride have no place in the Christian walk (**James 4:6; Proverbs 16:18**).

When we consider what God has done for us, there should be nothing that we would consider as being “beneath us” when it comes to serving others.

1 Peter 5:5b-6 “...*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*”

Conclusion:

One of the things we learn in scripture is that the way that we treat other people will be a factor involved in how God deals with us. The reading for this lesson was written in the context of some of God’s people shamefully treating their countrymen. While we may not be guilty of some of the specific things that they did, the principles behind **Micah 6:8** are just as valid today. For example;

- **Matthew 5:7** “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*”
- **Matthew 6:14-15** *Forgiveness of our sins depends on how we forgive others.*
- **Matthew 7:2** “*For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*”

Living godly lives is a “24/7” thing. We can’t “pigeon hole” devotion to God on Sundays and live the rest of the week indifferent to His Word. The way that we treat others is one of the areas where we can show our obedience to God (**1 John 5:2-3**). It is one of the ways that we can be a light to the world (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

What does the Lord require of you?

But to do justly

To love mercy

And to walk humbly with your God.” (**Micah 6:8**).