

“What Does the Lord Require of You?”

If the earth's population was shrunk into a village of just 100 people, what would this tiny village look like? Philip Harter, medical doctor at Stanford University School of Medicine, tried to figure this out and came up with these conclusions: 80 (out of 100) would have substandard housing; 70 (of those 100) would be unable to read; 50 (one-half) would suffer malnutrition; 1 would have a college education; and 1 would own a computer. Put another way: If we have food in our refrigerator, clothes on our back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, we are better off than 75% of the world's population. If we have money in the bank, in our wallet, or spare change in a dish somewhere, we are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

Also, someone reminded me that if we can attend a church meeting without harassment, arrest, torture, or death, we are fortunate, for more than 3 billion people in the world can't do that.

We do live in a world of hunger, poverty, war, injustice, and oppression. What should the church's response be, if anything? What should God's people do?

There is a side to the message of the Bible that is often overlooked. It is the “prophetic” ministry...addressing things in society that hurt people, and hinder them from reaching their God-given potential.

Evangelical Christians in many ways have been the most prone to overlook this part of the biblical message. A lot of Christians focus way too much on *personal salvation* and the *inner life*, and ignore the implications of our faith for the *public arena and our life in society*. Now faith has to be personal. The Christian life begins when we invite Christ into our life and begin a relationship with Him. But we can't stop there!

Some of the greatest heroes of the Bible were the *prophets* – men and women who spoke for God and addressed social evils of their day. Things like: bribery and injustice in the law courts, deception and dishonesty in business dealings, neglect of the poor and oppression of the weak, moral corruption in high and low places, and the worship of false gods.

Our Scripture text for today is from one of these Old Testament prophets: ***Micah***. Micah was a simple, straight-talking country man who preached in the 8th century B.C. to God's people in both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. He addressed some of the same issues that other prophets did. And as often happened (and happens) with prophets, many people didn't like what God was saying through him. In fact, Micah was told: “Don't preach about such things. Tell us things we want to hear!”

Perhaps the most memorable words of Micah are these classic words found in Micah 6:6-8: “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? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

These are radical words! God is saying through Micah that the whole system of animal sacrifices is insufficient. God doesn't accept empty worship, religion without righteous living! What God *does* want from us is that we *do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.*

We are to *do justice.* *Doing justice* is a huge thing in the Bible. The prophet Amos could thunder, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

"Justice" means seeing that people get a fair shake. Most of us, if we get treated unfairly, will complain or fight for our rights. The question is, can we move beyond self-interest to stand up for *others*, that *they* are treated fairly?

Think how many of problems in the world today are justice issues! The Brett Kavanaugh nomination for Supreme Court Justice was about justice. Who's telling the truth? His accusers, or him? Was it all politically motivated, spurred on by the Democrats, who didn't want a conservative on the bench of the Supreme Court?

The debate over illegal aliens is a justice issue. What's fair for those wanting to come into the U.S.? What would represent fair immigration laws or quotas? What's fair for illegal aliens already here? What's just and fair for those who went through the process and entered our country legally? What's fair for American citizens?

Some of the Old Testament prophets specifically spoke out against the *inequality and corruption in the law courts* of their day. How up-to-date is that! A study done of the American court system concluded that "justice" is available for those who can pay for it. Rich people and poor people are not treated the same.

Of course, *racial injustice* has been an ugly mark on American history. I read the autobiography of Walter Cronkite, the noted journalist. In that book he tells how when he was 10 years old his family moved to Houston. His dad was a dentist, who was to teach in one of the dental schools, and also go into practice with a wealthy dentist, leader in community. One evening they had been invited to dinner at this rich dentist's spacious home. They were sitting on the porch. They had ordered ice cream from a drug store in town. A black delivery boy brought it, and when the young man couldn't find the kitchen door, he brought the bag with the ice cream onto the porch. As he did, the host dentist bolted from his chair and punched the boy in the face, flattening him. "That'll teach you, nigger, to put your foot on a white man's porch." Cronkite writes how, with that, his father took the family and left – leaving behind the opportunity for a lucrative practice with this community leader. He also wrote how, later, this black friend named Louis, was killed by a white man with a shotgun one night while delivering ice cream.

God wants justice! God wants fair and square treatment for all! Now when we talk about these huge justice issues it's easy to think: What can I do? I can't change what's going on in Washington or on Wall Street. I can understand this feeling of helplessness. But remember, one person, Madelyn Murray O'hare had prayer taken out of our public schools. (Sometimes we

have more power than we think). But think of places where we *can* do something, where we can stand up for the “little guy” or go to bat for a person getting the short end of the stick. It could be a kid being picked on or bullied at school, or in the neighborhood. Maybe you can be the one to help get it stopped. It might be in a work situation, or something in your neighborhood. Someone is being hurt or taken advantage of in some way. Now if *we’re* the ones being short-changed, hopefully we will be able to speak up. Maybe we can do that for the other person, too. Sometimes all it takes is one person with the courage to confront the status quo and challenge the injustice, to spearhead change.

The prophet Micah proclaimed, “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice...”, and ***to love kindness***. Some translations have “to love *mercy*”. Actually, the word in Hebrew is hard to translate. It suggests the faithfulness and steadfast loyalty that binds two people together in a covenant. It is steady and dependable kindness and mercy towards one’s fellow human beings. There was a radio station that invited people to call in with reports of “random acts of kindness”. Nice! But Micah goes beyond saying we should do random, *occasional* acts of kindness. Rather we are to practice kindness as a *lifestyle*.

It is easy to be kind to people who are nice to us – but Jesus took it beyond this, and said we are to be kind and merciful even to people who may not deserve it. Some of you remember the television ministry of Jim and Tammy Bakker, the PTL Club, and the shame they brought upon themselves with their mishandling of donor’s money, and Jim’s sexual dalliance with a young lady. Bakker spent some years in prison.

Listen to what Billy Graham and his wife Ruth did for this fallen spiritual leader right after his release from prison (Jim tells the story):

“As soon as I was released from prison, Ruth Graham called the Salvation Army halfway house where I was and asked permission for me to go to church with her that Sunday morning. When I got there, the pastor welcomed me and sat me with the Graham clan – two whole rows of them. I’d only been out of prison 48 hours. The organ began playing and Ruth walked down the aisle and sat next to inmate 07407-058, telling the world that I was her friend.

“Afterwards she had me up to their cabin for dinner. When she asked me for some addresses, I pulled this envelope out of my pocket to look for them. In prison you’re not allowed to have a wallet, so you just carry an envelope. She asked, ‘Don’t you have a wallet?’ And I said, ‘Well, yeah, this is my wallet.’ After five years of brainwashing in prison you think an envelope is a wallet. She walked into the other room and said, ‘Here’s one of Billy’s wallets. He doesn’t need it. You can have it.’ The Grahams sponsored me, paid for a house for me to live in, and gave me a car to drive.”

The prophet Micah said, “What does the Lord require of you...but to love kindness...”. ***Who are the people in need of mercy and kindness that the church can reach out to?*** There is a story out of Seattle, Washington. Some of the homeless people in that city formed a group

called “Tent Village”. It was formed to protest the city’s closing of its winter homeless shelters during the warmer months. When this wandering group of homeless people asked to camp out at a church for 6 weeks, the congregation of 60 elderly members asked themselves, “What would Jesus do?” As a result, they allowed them to stay in the church’s parking lot. However, they didn’t realize that this was a violation of Seattle’s zoning laws. The tiny congregation was to be fined \$75 a day. But the church decided to fight back. The pastor said the church is supposed to provide sanctuary for people, and if these people weren’t in the parking lot they’d be out on the street. The city did back down, and rescinded the \$75 a day fine.

Now we may disagree over the solution to the problem of homelessness, but at least here’s one church that tried to show mercy and kindness in the midst of that social problem. The Old Testament prophets, including Micah, protested how God’s people were ignoring the needs of the poor, the powerless, and the dispossessed. I am glad that Community Church provides meals at First Reformed Church in Lancaster twice a year. Perhaps we could step it up, and do more? Also earlier this year some of us helped pack meals for the Feed My Starving Children organization, and we gave our Christmas Eve Service offering to this mission.

Micah said, “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and...” ***to walk humbly with your God.*** God requires that we relate to our *fellow human beings* with justice, and that we show mercy and kindness; but also that we relate *to God* by being humble before Him.

In many ways, our generation is arrogant before God. Check out some of the TV sitcoms at night, or current films, or Comedy Central and some of the comedy routines. Note the lack of reverence for God’s name and character. We human beings can flaunt ourselves before the awesome, holy God, acting like we are the masters of our own destiny.

There are other Scriptures that condemn this kind of arrogance before the Almighty: Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” The book of James in the New Testament says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”, and again, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (James 4:6,10). This is rather clear, isn’t it. God opposes the proud! But God is gracious towards the humble.

The only way we can have a relationship with God is if we approach Him in humility. He is God, and we are not! He is holy, and we are sinful. We can only have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus, and realizing that we need a Savior. And when we do that, He reaches out with mercy and blesses us!

So, we want to know what God expects of us? Well here it is, “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

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