

Micah 6:1-8

Let's have a short, very brief, refresher course on the Old Testament. God formed the earth out of the void. God filled the earth with darkness and light, with land and sea, with fruit and vegetables, land creatures and sea creatures. God saw all this was good, but one thing was missing. God created humanity, placed them in this lovely garden where all their needs were met, with only one rule: "Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for on that day you shall die" (Gen. 2:16). Well, we know that the serpent lured them into eating the fruit, and that day when God came walking in the garden looking for them, they hid. Even the first man and woman tried to hide from their sin.

The first humans are banished from the garden into a hard life that will end in death. Time goes on, people move farther away from God (who is no longer walking the earth talking with the humans he created) and finally their sin is so difficult for God that he wants to destroy the earth and his people who have strayed too far. God tells Noah to build an ark. A small remnant of humanity is saved.

History continues and eventually God calls Abram and Sarai to move from their homeland to new places with a promise they will have descendants greater than the grains of sand on the seashore, greater than the stars in the heavens. Generation after generation passed. The people demanded a king like the rest of the nations around them. God granted them their wish. And the nations did as their kings ruled. If their king was a God follower, they followed and worshipped God. If their king was committed to following the idols of the neighboring nations, then the people worshipped the false idols. Some kings listened to God's prophets; others listened to false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear.

At a point in time the kingdom of Israel split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom, comprised of ten of the tribes, was taken into captivity and absorbed into the nation of Assyria. The Bible tells us this is because of the kings' evil deeds and sins. The southern kingdom, whose capital was Jerusalem, survived because they were a bit more faithful to God. However, not all their kings were faithful. God's prophets Isaiah and Micah were alive at the same time, both bringing messages to Kings Johaz, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a godly king, and according to the work of archaeologists ..., the reign of Hezekiah saw a notable increase in the power of the Judean state. At this time, Judah was the strongest nation on the Assyrian–Egyptian frontier (Na'aman, Nadav. *Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors*, Eisenbrauns, 2005, ISBN 978-1575061085). Why was Hezekiah such a good king? Because he listened to God, and he paid attention to God's prophet Micah.

Micah 6 is relating a time when God's people were not paying attention to God. Through Micah they are reminded that God has done many "saving acts" for them. They were delivered from Egyptian slavery. When the nation of Moab would have cursed them, God saved them during their time in the wilderness (Numbers 22-24). God is not only asking why they are ungrateful, but also why they no longer believe they need to obey God. God is offended and demands they answer his charges.

The people realize they are wrong and want God to explain to them what they need to do to become acceptable to God, after all, they are observing the laws of sacrifice, they even offer to sacrifice much more to God. God tells them that's not what is missing, God doesn't want more meaningless sacrifices. God says they need to care for one

another: to do justice, to love mercy or kindness, and to walk humbly with God. They need to grow together as God's covenant people.

The Hebrew for justice, *mishpat*, is to make things right, to make things equitable. The word for mercy is *hesed*, kindness, a covenant loyalty. When Micah tells them God wants them to walk humbly with their God, it's not meaning they are unworthy, it means that God is blessing them, but God expects them to do something with their blessings. God wants them to use the law to their benefit, not as a crutch. God wants them to use the law as a mirror so they can recognize what they are doing wrong. And then correct it.

I'm not one to preach Old Testament law to you, however this passage speaks to me. We are not left out of this judgement. What is it that we use for our sacrificial means? Does coming to church an hour on Sunday, and giving an offering or a tithe cover our need to please God? Does reading the Bible and praying make it better? Or attending Bible study?

I'm not knocking those things, they are all great ways of building a relationship with God. But, like the people in the time of Micah, God expects us to do something more with our faith. The Good News of the Gospel does not come without expectations. What God expects is not impossible.

God would like for us to build a community centered around the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught us that God is love. Our thoughts and actions are to be centered in love, love of God and love of neighbor. Not just the people we know and like, but all God's people. All of them.

Just as Micah implored the people of his time to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God, Jesus wants us to do the same. Where can we be more equitable in our interactions with others? When we split something and it isn't quite equal halves do we keep the larger portion for ourselves, or do we give it to the other? When there's a discrepancy do we expect to receive the larger share or do we look for what is best for all parties involved? Do we jump to conclusions without knowing the facts, or do we do the research behind what seems to be out of place?

How do we show kindness? Showing kindness doesn't mean we are a doormat, someone who people can walk all over. It does mean that we don't act out of anger. It does mean that we smile at others, help where it is needed, reach out to others to ask what their need is. It's important to know what the need actually is before trying to help. I have been told that the church's mission, not here at Immanuel, but the church at large, has sometimes been way off base, doing what looks like what needs done to an outsider, when the community they are "helping" doesn't consider that a problem and has other needs the church could help with. That can be considered treating others with respect, and treating others with respect is another way of showing kindness.

The last item God expresses through Micah is to walk humbly with God. It is knowing that we need God in our lives, knowing that without God life is meaningless. It doesn't mean we self-deprecate or put ourselves down. It does mean we don't put others down in order to make us feel better about ourselves. It does mean that we speak out when we see an injustice, relying on the word of God (not taken out of context), but within the entire message of the Bible which teaches that God is love.

Love, honor, respect, build community as we expand our relationships, that's what God wants from us. And we are blessed to be a blessing! All glory be to God.