

"WHAT GOD WANTS FROM US"

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" Micah 6:8.

Micah lived in the country and was a stranger to wealth and ease. He was a farmer and belonged to the common folk both by birth and by choice. He was the poor man's friend. He contented himself with messages to people of his own kind. For them he requested justice and with them he pleaded for loyalty to God.

Living in the country, Micah was naturally a bit suspicious of city people. He came to look upon the cities as veritable cesspools of iniquity and injustice. Out where social wrongs were more keenly felt than anywhere else, Micah was able to sense the sufferings of the peasants under the cruel pressure of men who had power. The people were so greedy for wealth that no step was too low for them if a bit of money was forthcoming. The nation was ready for a collapse. The princes, the priests, the prophets and the people were responsible for its downfall.

On every hand there was a spirit utterly foreign to the sort of religious fervor that Micah desired. The people did not want any preaching done except the weak, insipid variety that would allow them to go on in their way without embarrassment. It is a tragic hour when people want to hear only the man or the men who caters to their selfish and sinful natures. The sins of those times have been summarized as follows: -- oppression of the poor, unscrupulous use of power, lack of integrity, reckless scorn of religion, false prophets and greedy corruption in religious and state circles. Micah felt called of God to denounce the evils that were blighting his people. He said, "I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord ... to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." But his ministry was far more than one of denunciation. His message was also constructive. He was inspired to define the will of God with a beautiful simplicity. It is doubtful if any man in all the centuries has improved on Micah's definition of real religion. He asked, "What doth the Lord require of thee?" In other words, What is necessary to please God? The answer which Micah gave is so simple that a child can understand it. It may be pointed out that Amos pleaded with Israel to do justly, that Hosea pleaded with her to love mercy, that Isaiah pleaded with her to walk humbly with God, and that Micah welded all three of these into a compact definition of Old Testament religion. Micah said that religion, to be anything, must be reasonable, practical, spiritual and personal.

Does the Lord require the three things stated in the text of believers or unbelievers? The answer is provided in the context. Twice in the preceding verses God referred to them as "My people." Who are the ones whom God called "My people"? God said, "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants." His people are those whom He redeemed out of Egypt and brought into the place of deliverance. The appeal is not made to the unsaved, but to that company of people whom He Himself saved.

Some timid soul among the Israelites spoke up and said, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or 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?" (verses 6-7). It is easily seen how this person was troubled about his relation to God. Apparently he wanted to do that which was pleasing to God, but did not know what to do. While this man was ignorant of what God wanted, yet he gave evidence of willingness, hence God supplied the answer, and He did so through the lips and writings of one of His trusted prophets.

Micah replied to his questions in clear and unmistakable terms. He stated in effect

that if this inquirer had turned to the Scriptures, he would have found the solution. God's mind in the matter was on record, and to this the prophet referred when he wrote, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Mark the tremendous appeal that is made here. If you will look back over this chapter, you will see that it begins by stating that God has a controversy with His people. He asks His people, "What have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me." He also reminds them of the good He has done them. Then He puts Himself, as it were, in their place, and says: Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or 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?" These questions are followed by the answer: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

It is easy for us to see that God's requirements are comprehensive -- for all things are included; explicit -- so that every one can understand them and realize the necessity of complying with them; and few in number -- three.

I. God Requires Justice.

God requires His children "to do justly." That manner of doing was the very opposite of the way in which the Israelites were living. Is it not strange that God had to require His own people to do justly? Is it not even more strange that, in the day in which we live, people have to be required to do justly? God wants us to think, to speak and to act justly. God demands of us an absolute integrity in all our relations, public and private, with our fellowmen, not only in our actions toward them, but in our thoughts and feelings regarding them.

Only a child of God can do rightly and justly in his dealings with all people. What is it to do justly? Simply to give all their due.

1. Give to God His due.

To love God with all your mind, heart, soul and strength is your first duty. This is simple justice. As your Creator, Preserver and Redeemer, God has a perfect right to ask it and to expect it of you.

2. Give others their due.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." To your neighbor you must give his due. To do to him as you would have him do unto you, never working any ill to him; to do him no wrong in his person, his property or his reputation; to deal fairly with him in his presence and in his absence; to do him good in every way possible.

3. Give yourself your due.

You cannot deal unjustly with yourself and do justly with God and with your fellowmen. To be just to yourself you must care for your soul. You must not deprive it of that which God has provided for its culture. You must keep your body in sobriety, chastity and control. You must keep your tongue from evil, your heart pure, your hands clean and your mind at peace. For your own sake, as well as that of others, God wants you to think, to speak and to act justly. Doing justly with reference to God, to others and to self is what God wants from us.

II. God Requires Mercy.

God requires His children "to love mercy." God asks not only that we be just, but also that we be kind. Kindness is love in action. Not only does God want us to do justly, but also to show tenderness and mercifulness in our dealings with others. He wants us to have a mercifulness in feeling that will lead to mercifulness in action. This He desires, not from compulsion of conscience only, but from generosity of heart. Realizing how much we need mercy ourselves, we are to yield our rights rather than press them to the uttermost.

III. God Requires Piety.

God requires His children "to walk humbly with" Him. Walk with God! That calls for a life of deepening friendship with Him. Walking humbly with God means friendship, companionship and fellowship. "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). To walk with God means to know Him so well and to love Him so much that you count it life's utmost joy to live in His presence. Walking with God, which is indicative of progress, is a superlative privilege. This walk is one of joy and triumph. The man walks with God who converses with Him in prayer, runs to Him with his necessities, asks His counsel in his problems, laments before Him the fact of his sins, asks for strength in place of his weaknesses, fears Him as his judge, reveres Him as his Father, obeys Him as his Lord and advises with Him as his friend.

God yearns for His children to walk with Him in genuine piety because He truly loves us. He longs for our fellowship not only because He cannot be satisfied without us, but because He knows that we can never be satisfied without Him. God longs for our fellowship because He knows that it is only as we walk with Him that we shall be truly just and merciful. Justice and mercy at their best flow out of this lovely fountain of fellowship with God. Justice, mercy and piety are the fruit of a life hidden in God. Any man who walks humbly with God will do justly and love mercy.

Pride, which is the deadliest of sins, cannot live and thrive in a heart that is so near to Almighty God. Pride appears in different forms, such as pride of intellect, pride of position, pride of power, pride of race, pride of nationality, pride of ancestry, pride of personal appearance or pride of wealth. It may be pride of look, or of speech, or of life.

These three requirements result from the very nature of God and our relationship with Him. It is only in and through Christ that these requirements can be met and these heights can be attained.