

WHAT GOD REQUIRES OF 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 latter part of the eighth century before Christ. He lived in the country and was a stranger to wealth and ease. He was a farmer and belonged to the common folk by birth and by choice. He was the friend of the poor, for whom he requested justice and with whom 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 judges were venal, the priests were immoral and corrupt, the prophets were hirelings, the nobles took peculiar delight in fleecing the poor, and the entire group had built up a wall of enmity, fear and hatred that made life miserable for all classes. The nation was ready for a collapse, and for this the princes, priests, prophets and people were responsible. People were so greedy for wealth that no step was too low for them if a bit of money was involved.

On every hand there was a spirit which was utterly foreign to the sort of religious fervor that Micah desired. The people did not want to hear any preaching except the weak, insipid variety that would allow them to go on their sinful ways without embarrassment. It is a tragedy when people want to hear only those who cater to their selfish and sinful natures. The sins of Micah's time may be summarized as follows: oppression of the poor, unscrupulous use of power, lack of integrity, reckless scorn of religion, false prophets, and greedy corruption in both religious and state circles. Micah was called of God to denounce the evils which were blighting the lives of his people. But his ministry was far more than one of mere denunciation. His message was constructive also. Being preeminently a prophet of the poor and a friend of the oppressed, he championed their rights against the wrongs of his age with an indescribably delightful heroism and fearlessness which present-day Christians would do well to emulate. Being a very practical man, Micah stressed the fact that one's religion should manifest itself in upright and godly living. He believed that true religion is a matter of proper relationship with God, resulting in being right with one's fellowmen also.

God had been gracious and merciful to His people, but they had forsaken Him and turned to other gods. Therefore, God challenged them, through His prophet, to explain why they had done so, and to declare their reasons for having grown weary of Him. Somewhat after the fashion of a court scene in which witnesses are called and a verdict is sought, God acted as the plaintiff and the people were the defendants. Unwilling to give them up, God challenged them to give the reasons for their spiritual declension.

As proof of His abundant love for them, God reminded the people of the fact that He had done many wonderful things for them, and had extended to them numerous mercies which they should not have forgotten. He called their attention to the fact that He had miraculously delivered them from the land of Egypt, and enabled them to make

the journey therefrom to the Jordan River. During their journey to Canaan, King Balak had invited Balaam to pronounce a curse upon them, but God did not permit him to do so. Rather, God influenced Balaam to bless them. Pleadingly, God called on them to state their grievances against him, if they had any.

Fully aware that they had sinned grievously against God, they were anxious to learn how they might atone for their evil ways. As is often the case, they concluded that they could do something by themselves which would make them right with God. In a string of abominably sarcastic questions, they asked God what He was expecting of them. Petulantly the people inquired, "Just what does God want; what will it take to please Him?" Their ignorance of what would please God revealed their true condition. The question, "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?", was a clear indication of the depths of degradation to which they had sunk, for it refers to the abominable custom which prevailed among the heathen of offering their own children in sacrifice. Their seeming willingness to bring their own children as sacrifices to God shows that they were without a true knowledge of the will of God, and that they were still laboring under the delusion that the wrath of God could be expiated by human sacrifices. Seemingly they were willing to offer anything to God except what He asked for, namely, the love of their hearts and the obedience of their lives.

Without any hesitation God, through His prophet, told them what He was requiring of them. His statement was one of the most beautiful in the entire prophecy of Micah. The purpose of this statement was to teach that pleasing God was not a matter of outward forms of worship when the eternal principles of right and wrong are totally disregarded. God will not be propitiated by the offering of material things as a sacrifice, or by any mere outward profession of piety. God told the people that while they practiced pride, injustice and cruelty, their sacrifices would be without value in His sight and an abomination to Him. His desire for them was that they would be obedient to Him.

The question is asked, "What doth the Lord require of thee?" In other words, What is necessary to please God? The answer which Micah recorded there is so simple that a child can understand it. It may be pointed out that Amos pleaded with the Israelites to do justly, that Hosea pleaded with them to love mercy, that Isaiah pleaded with them 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 of any value, must be reasonable, practical, spiritual and personal. Micah reduced the religious duties of God's children to three: doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Justice and mercy are duties we owe to each other, and piety is what we owe to God. Here is the essence of right thinking, feeling, willing, doing and living.

God's requirements are comprehensive and yet very explicit. What does God require of us?

I. "To Do Justly."

"Jus" is an old Latin word for right. It lies at the very heart of the divine requirements. God wants us to do right, to conform to righteousness. God wants us to think, to speak, and to act justly. This means being right with God,

right with others, and right with self. God demands of His children 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. What is it to do justly? It is to give all their due.

1. Give to God His due.

Our first duty, as His children, is to love God with all the mind, heart, soul and strength. As our Creator, Preserver and Redeemer, God has a perfect right to ask this of us and to expect it of us.

2. Give to others their due.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." To your neighbor you must give his due. This means to do unto him as you would have him do unto you, never working any ill to him; not to do him any 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 justly with God and with your fellowmen and deal unjustly with yourself. Neither can you deal unjustly with God and justly with yourself or with others. 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 for the sake of others, God wants you to think, to speak and to act justly. To meet this requirement, you must receive a power that is mightier than your own.

II. "To Love Mercy."

God not only asks that we do justly, but also that we love mercy and be kind. Kindness is love in action. Kindness is a child of love. Merely to be kind does not sound too heroic, yet nothing would do more to sweeten life and to change a human desert into a garden than plain, everyday kindness. God is infinitely merciful and kind. Luke summarized the beautiful life of our wonderful Lord in a single sentence by saying, "He went about doing good." That is just another way of saying that He sent about being kind. There is never a day so uneventful that we do not have an opportunity to be kind. Kindness is needed everywhere. Kindness enriches both the giver and the receiver. God wants us to show tenderness and mercifulness in our dealings with others. He wants us to have a mercifulness in action. Realizing how much we need mercy ourselves, we should yield our rights rather than press them to the uttermost.

III. "To Walk Humbly With God."

Walking with God calls for a life of deepening friendship with Him. To walk with God means to know Him so well and to love Him so much that you can count

it life's utmost joy to live in His presence. Walking with God, which is our supreme privilege, is indicative of progress. This manner of walking is one that guarantees light, joy and triumph. The person who walks humbly with God has a teachable, submissive, thankful, patient and dependent spirit. He enjoys a close communion with God, and exercises an increasing trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any Christian who walks humbly with God 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, reveres and loves Him as his Father, obeys Him as his Lord, and advises with Him as his Friend.

Because God truly loves us, He yearns for us to walk with Him in genuine piety. He longs for our fellowship because He knows that it is only as we walk humbly 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 fruits 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 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 exhibited by a look, by the speech, or by the life.

What does God require of us? The answer is "to do justly," "to love mercy," and "to walk humbly with thy God." This threefold requirement includes our works, our worship and our walks. These are strict requirements, the very minimum of what God demands of His children. It must be understood that this verse does not show the way of salvation, but it declares that God requires of those who have been saved. God still expects these things of each of His children. It is encouraging to know that God has made a provision whereby these stupendous requirements may be met, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is impossible for anyone to meet these requirements apart from Christ, but His grace is sufficient to enable us to meet them.