

Micah 6:1-2, 6-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. “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, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Luke 6:43-49 (New Revised Standard Version)

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”

In “War and Remembrance”, Hermon Wouk’s epic novel about WWII,
he describes a model community set up by the Nazis
to house well-known, noteworthy and famous Jews.
It was a public relations attempt to convince the world
that mass murder at concentration camps was just a myth.

The book describes how when the Red Cross inspectors would visit,
Nazis went all out trying to create a false and benign impression,
so they saw nothing of what was really going on inside the camp.
Then as soon as the Red Cross inspectors show-tour ended
life returned back to the same threats, horror and abuse as before.

In 1787, Prince Grigori Potemkin of Czarist Russia
organized a lavish river cruise for Catherine the Great,
to float by village after village of prosperous-looking peasants,
so to show-off the results of extensive building projects
that she financed and he was supposed to have accomplished.

But in truth those “Potemkin Villages” were only painted facades,
and the peasants had been shipped in and dressed for the occasion,
then were returned to their previous lives of poverty and misery.

What’s being shown, was quite different than what’s really going on.

In Luke, one of the significant themes that flows through the Gospel
is the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities.

The scribes and Pharisees were very meticulous and careful
to follow and obey every detail of religious ritual and Law,
but it was more about outward appearance than a faithful heart.

Repeatedly,
Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy of their religious façade.
They focused on appearances, their words and deeds, external piety,

with little emphasis on the internal authenticity of their faith.
What's being shown, was quite different than what's really going on.

In our passage today, Jesus makes
a critical distinction between the internal and external,
warning that what's inside will eventually be revealed, vs. 43-45.

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the **good treasure of the heart** produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Jesus is locating evil within, as a condition of the human heart.
Whatever we do or say, our attitude & perspective are all derived
from whatever we have allowed and accumulated on the inside.

Under pressure of circumstance, over time, temper and desire,
our motives and attitudes will leak out in the form of words & deeds.
Whatever we've got on the inside will eventually work its way out,
and much to our regret, isn't that something we've all experienced.

Several times in the New Testament Jesus taught and explained
that faithful discipleship is really about a focus on relationships
far more than simply following religious rules, as in Mat 22:37-40,
'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This
is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On
these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

His point is that God wants more than just our worship & good deeds.
Our relationship with God & neighbor reveal the content of our heart.

God's call is much more than an outward holiness of religious ritual,
It's inward holiness that transforms human hearts and affections,
for it takes a change of heart to redirect our outward behavior...
... or from the internal our outward behavior, good or evil, will flow.

That understanding did not begin with Jesus in Palestine.
Back during the time of the prophet Micah,
outwardly, the nation of Israel was very religious,
and they were doing rituals and sacrifices perfectly,
and yet the nation of Israel had become exceedingly corrupt.

What's being shown, was quite different than what's really going on.

In Micah, God asks,
have I not fulfilled my part of the covenant, our agreement?
Have I not been faithful? – and done all that I promised?
And are you not far less than I blessed and intended for you to be?

For five chapters, the prophet explains various ways the nation
had abandoned God's ways & how they had been instructed to live.
In arrogance, they'd assumed their worship rituals would save them,
and that God wouldn't notice their corruption, sin and insincerity.

Micah presents God's complaint in the format of a lawsuit, vs. 1 & 2,

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.
Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

Confronted with the truth of God's accusations & their guilt, vs. 6-7,

"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?"

How typically human to ask,

how can I buy my way out of this, and what's it going to cost me?

God was not interested in any huge payment of stuff or sacrifice,
as if God's favor and love were some commodity to be purchased.

So what does the Lord God want? It's inward change, not the external.

God's focus is not our stuff or deeds, but actually **God wants us**.

It's not about what we have, or even what we do, **but who we are**.

God wants to be our God, to have an authentic relationship with us,
so that God can bless and guide us toward living in truth,
in the wonderful and meaningful life God intends for us...

... and for us **to look at life through the lens of that relationship**.

God has given us this time and place in which to live and learn,
in which to grow in our faith toward a closer walk with our God...

... and it's more about our ordinary daily life than our religious life,
for we were fashioned for an intimate relationship with God,
and created to make a difference in the world for God's sake.

Through the prophet Micah, God explains what is necessary ... vs. 8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

1st -- to do justice

In the Old Testament, justice is a very broad concept,
which includes God's desire and intention
for us to live together in peaceful community,
following the ideals of justice, mercy and fair treatment.

God's justice calls us to balanced and caring relationships
that place the good and welfare of other people
ahead of our own wants, desires and inclinations.

Justice is making decisions and choices in life
that honor God's truth and gracious love for us.

2nd -- to love kindness

In Hebrew, loving-kindness is a word that describes
God's love, mercy, nurture and compassion toward us,
and our call to respond by showing that same
compassion, mercy and kindness to other people.

It describes a life that is defined by God's grace and mercy,
that then guides our affections, our treatment of all others.

3rd -- to walk humbly with God

Humility is recognizing our need and dependence before God.

It's when our relationship with God is our life's anchor

and we are sensitive to

God's presence and blessings.

It is living to honor and deepen our relationship with the Lord.

What God requires is not so that God will love and save us,

and it's also not so that we can avoid hell and get into heaven.

It means that doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God,

those things matter to the Lord toward our own good and growth,

to help position ourselves to receive the blessings God intends.

The term, blessing is most critical to our Christian understanding.

To be blessed infers that having received God's gracious love,

that we are then called and equipped to live in new godly ways,

in ways that faithfully reflect God's Holy Spirit,

God's promises and presence in our lives and living,

that relies on God's strength and wisdom, and not on our own.

This is not a set of rules or specific commandments to follow,

but how our external is influenced by God's Spirit inside us,

and asks, since God is my Lord, what does that really look like?

In my experience, my significant experiences of growth toward God

have never been something that I have done or accomplished,

but my spiritual spurts have always come as an enlargement

of my appreciation of God's great mercy and awesome love.

Certainly it's helped to become more disciplined in prayer.

It has helped to read more of the Bible more regularly.

It's been important to be a Christian in fellowship,

who actively and faithfully serves in the church.

Certainly **I had to be where** I could hear and respond to God's voice,

but it was not by my religious deeds or good works

that spurts & surges of spiritual growth were accomplished.

Jesus raises a very demanding and challenging question, vs. 46,

'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I tell you?

That's not a guilt or shame question, but a call to pause and reflect.

Really, what does God want from me? What is his will for my life?

How well am I using all that God has entrusted to me as of today,

the gift of life itself, the blessings & my situation right now?

Here & now in this time and place, how would Jesus say that I'm doing?

Jesus describes an amazing picture of God's graciousness at work,

empowering & enabling us to withstand the force of storm, vs. 48-49

I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like

a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst

against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built.

The call today is not to take a specific action or try even harder.

It's a call to trust and reflect, and then **respond from within**

according to the powerful truth of God's will, love and grace,

for it's that which brings about and leads
to a living faith that pleases the Lord...
... for us to reflect the blessings and grace we have received.

Righteous is the gift of grace and mercy only through Jesus Christ,
that leads to our faith and an authentic relations with God,
which leads to transforming us and our lives from within.

As our affections,
that is, that which we love and value most shift toward the Lord,
our outward behavior and attitudes will also move toward God.

Faith is about letting Christ in to reign and transform our hearts,
and not just our outward religious appearances and good deeds.
God desires to rule our affections, for then outward will follow.

This is not a message that we're not trying hard enough,
but the question to ask, am I making room enough
for God's grace to grow, heal and transform my life?

Our call is to a refreshed awareness of God and God's grace,
of God's presence and activity in our lives and in the world...

... so that we celebrate our Lord's faithfulness a lot more,
and live out a deeper sense of gratitude, joy and hope...
... and that, surely the world around us will take notice.

So am I so wrapped up in my own security, happiness & success
that I'm buying into the false premises & ways of this world?
Am I seeing my Christian service, my Bible study and devotions
as trying to buy God's favor, or am I really open and seeking?

Do my relationships reflect the truth and gentleness of Jesus Christ,
and are they consistent with the faith I claim to have and believe?
Is my faith such that my life does reflect the ways and values of God?

(Micah 6:8 *The Message*)

But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously.