

Micah 6

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Date: 02 April 2023

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[0 : 00] Micah 6. And just again, that book for David and Marsh would be lovely! If we could get lots of people to sign it and to write messages! for them, if you're able to do that.

And then we're meeting for prayer on Wednesday. Don't forget that. Micah 6. So school exams are coming up, aren't they? Sophie and Marius are doing GCSEs, aren't they? I'm sure they're delighted to be reminded about that.

And when I was in school, I don't know if it's the same now, when you were preparing for exams, your teachers would give you kind of exam coaching, wouldn't they? They'd give you this advice and they'd give you this strongly over and over again, repeated words.

So they would say to me and the others in my class, they'd say, don't panic, make sure you take the time to read the questions carefully. Did you get that advice? Because time and time again, people rush in and they come out afterwards and they confer with people only to find out that they've given a perfect answer to a question that wasn't on the paper.

Make sure you read the paper properly because people often give a good answer to a question that wasn't on the paper. It's very sad when people do that, isn't it?

[1 : 11] It's tragic, actually. You feel gutted if you've done that. And yet, how often many people do that when it comes to God? Because what does God require of us?

What does God expect from you? And what does God want from you? There are lots and lots of people in churches, aren't there, sitting like you are tonight and they think they know what God requires of them.

And without any reflection, they busily go about their lives and they think they know what God requires of them only to find out too late on the day of judgment that they've read the question wrongly.

And so look at verse 8. It's a really famous verse, isn't it? And I want to speak really from the whole chapter but kind of hone in on that verse. Verse 8 is the text.

What does the Lord require of you? That's the question. He has told you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? Let's do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.

[2 : 20] That's what the Lord requires of us. But the question is, how can we actually do that? And in order for us to understand that, we need to put this really famous verse into its context.

If you look at the passage, you'll notice that the passage describes a courtroom. Look at the opening verse, what it says. It says, doesn't it? Hear what the Lord says.

Arise. Court, arise. Plead your case before the mountains and let the hills hear your voice. Hear you mountains, the indictment of the Lord and you enduring foundations of the earth.

For the Lord has got an indictment. The Lord has got a case against Israel. Against his people. And he will contend with Israel. Everyone is entitled to their day in court. So we say, don't we?

And this is God's day in court. And God has got a charge against his people and his people, Israel, are in the dock. God is the plaintiff and the mountains and the ancient hills, they're in the witness box.

[3 : 26] That's the scene that's painted here in Micah chapter 6. And the charge is this to the people of Israel. You have not given the Lord what he requires of them. That's the charge against them.

That's the big issue. What does the Lord require of us? Now Israel is their defense, you notice. They bring into court the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Look at verses 6 and 7. Here is Israel defending themselves against this charge. Well, with what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings? Here they

are.

With calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? With ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Isn't that enough? Haven't we done enough for you, Lord? What next? How much more do you think you can have? How much more do you want? Do you think you'll be expecting us, God, to offer up our children next?

[4 : 23] Is that what you want? Shall I give my firstborn, verse 7, for my transgressions? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Aren't you satisfied with animal sacrifices?

Do I have to give my firstborn? How much more, God, do you require of me? Aren't you asking too much? What more does God require of us?

At St. Paul's Cathedral in the center of town, kind of one of the great buildings of the world, isn't it? One of the great church buildings. St. Christopher Wren was the architect.

And I remember hearing about a man whose job it was to lead tours of St. Paul's Cathedral. If you go to visit, I don't know whether you can get in as a worshiper on Sunday.

I assume you can, but if you're not a worshiper, you've got to pay to get in. And this guy was a tourist guide. And so if you want to go round at St. Paul's, someone like him will show you around.

[5 : 22] And this guy, he got into conversation with his tour group, and he was asked, do you enjoy your work? And the man said, yeah, there's only one drawback.

He said, I can never get to a place of worship. So busy on a Sunday, I can never get to a place of worship. Think about that for a moment, the irony of that. It's a man who spent his life inside St. Paul's Cathedral showing people around, and yet he said, I can never get to a place of worship. That's my problem. And I want to decide if that's an application for us. Do you ever get to a place of worship? You say you're in one, now.

Well, not necessarily. For all our Bible reading, and for all our singing of hymns, and for all our praying, for all our fellowshiping, for all our religious observances, for all the Sundays that we've spent in this place, for all the sermons that I've preached and you've had to listen to, do we ever get to a place of worship?

Notice how God is described here in verse 6. With what? Shall I come before the Lord? It's the word Yahweh.

[6 : 40] It's his covenant name. God is revealing himself. He is giving Israel a handle on who he is. He's giving a name to himself.

You can call me this, he says. Yahweh, the Lord, how shall I come before this one, the Lord who's revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush?

This isn't one of the pagan deities that's out there in Canaan. It isn't one of the fertility gods or the gods of war or the gods of whatever or wherever. This is Yahweh.

Do you notice how he's described? With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? It's not like the Roman pantheon.

This is not Zeus or Jupiter or Mars or Venus. It's not like the pagan deities. The problem with pagan deities or the Greek gods is they were just really souped up human beings, weren't they, behaving badly.

[7 : 42] That's all they are. And the problem with religion is that you've got to get on the right side of your god. And so if you are a pagan Canaanite and you need to get on the right side of your god, your god who brings fertility, well, if you fall out with your god, with him or with her, then your crops won't grow.

And it's tit for tat. That's what religion is. But our god, Yahweh, the god of the Bible, is above all that. He is the exalted one.

The god of the Bible, the god whom we worship, is not some tin pot god that you can manipulate and that you can get blessings from him. No, he's the exalted one. And so how can I appear before the one who is exalted?

That's the question. How do I get to a place of worship? That's the question in all my religious activity. In all my religious observance, that is a very important question because unless we get to a place of worship, unless we get to that place of brokenness and bowing down and prostrating ourselves before him and adoring him, well, I can tell you what happens in ministry.

What happens in ministry is you burn out. All the sermons I prepare, all the sermons I preach, if I never get to a place of worship, in the end, it just becomes intolerable toil.

[9 : 09] Do you see the issue? If saying my prayers, singing the hymns, going through the routine, do I ever get to a place of adoration?

And the question is, what does God require? And how do I get to the place where I can bow before the exalted God and come before Yahweh and pour out my heart before him and praise him in an attitude of worship?

And the answer comes in verses three to five. Do you notice God's answer to the question? He's charging them for all their religiosity, but they're not actually getting it.

They're not actually coming before him and worshiping him. That's the charge. And they've brought in the sacrificial system and all the things they've offered before him and all the things they've done for him.

And this is his answer in verses three to five. It's the cry, isn't it? Can you see how it begins? Oh, oh. It's a cry from the heart of God.

[10 : 13] Oh, my people. And he's not only pleading against his people, he is doing that in verses one to two because he's got a charge against them. But he's not only pleading against his people, he's at the same time pleading with his people.

So listen to what he says. He says, oh, my people, Israel, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me, for I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the house of slavery.

I sent you, before you, Moses, Aaron, Miriam. Oh, my people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, devised and what Balab, the son of Beor, answered him.

And what happened from Shittim to Gilgal that you may know the righteous act of the Lord. Verse five, that journey, what happened between Shittim and Gilgal, it's the journey across the Jordan. That's what it is. There are two places on either side. And the geography, it might be a little bit foreign to us, but it wasn't to them. These people should know their history.

[11 : 15] And what God is doing here is he's reminding these people of what he's done for them. That's really important, isn't it? If you become, I don't know, like, if you say, right, I'm going to become Welsh, all right, I'm going to become a Welshman, you can't just make that, there's certain things you've got to know.

There's certain things you've got to understand. You've got to understand the beauty of a place like Swansea. You've got to know certain things about our history.

You've got to know about O'England Dool. You've got to know about these nationalists burning English people's houses down in the 1960s. You've got to know about the mining community. You can't just say your Welsh. If you say your Welsh, you've got to know your history. It's in wherever you're from, isn't it? And that's what he's saying here. Don't you know your history? He's saying you won't make the right response to God. You won't make the right response to God. You won't worship God in an acceptable way. You won't know what God requires of you until first you understand what God has done for you.

[12 : 32] And I think that's a really key message in the Bible. You will not worship God until you understand what he's done for you. And maybe the reason actually why you're not worshipping God is because you haven't understood what he's done for you.

In fact, that's the pattern in the New Testament, isn't it? You see it in the New Testament letters. Broadly, Paul's letters in the New Testament are always split into two. The first half is indicative what God has done and the second half is ordinarily how we're to live that out, the imperative. He tells us what God has done and then he tells us what we are to do. The indicative, it points to the great salvation that God has accomplished. And only then there is the imperative to live it out. And so, a number of years ago, it seems to disappear, there was this thing called the Micah Challenge, a guy called Jim Wallace, you probably don't remember it. But it was a big thing, wasn't it? So churches and the big message of Christianity is what?

They would say to act justly, walk humbly before our God. Act justly, love kindness, walk humbly before our God.

[13 : 41] the problem with all that was that it didn't point you to what God had done, the facts of salvation. It didn't give you the indicative, it didn't give you the oh my people, oh my people.

Remember, he says, remember what I've done to you. It's a bit, I hesitate to use this illustration, but Monty Python, I've got a sketch, in the life of Brian, which is not a film I recommend, but there's a sketch in it, where there's a really brilliant sketch in it.

The Jewish authorities are plotting to overthrow the Romans. You'll know the sketch as I tell you about it. And one of the leaders stands up and says, what have the Romans ever done for us? It's a very funny scene. Somebody pipes up from the back of the crowd, well, there's the aqueduct. Another one puts up his hand and says, there's the roads. Another one says, there's sanitation. And then the answers start flooding in. There's irrigation, medicine, public baths, law and order, education. All right, all right, says the leader. Apart from the aqueducts, the roads, the sanitation, irrigation, medicine, education, public baths, law and order, and education, what have these people ever done for us?

[15:00] That's what they're doing in Micah. They're saying, what has the Lord ever done for us? All the times I've slaved for you, all the sacrifices I've offered. The thousands of rams, the rivers of oils I've poured out, worshipping you, observing your religious practices.

And what has he ever done for us? Oh, my people, God says, oh, my people. Remember, remember. And he mentions all these things.

It's the history of God's dealing with Israel. These people, these places, they're foreign to us, but they wouldn't be foreign to them. He says, remember how I brought you out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God who redeemed you. Who redeemed you from the house of slavery.

Remember how I gave you Moses and Aaron and Miriam.

I led you through the wilderness. Do you remember when the Moabites, they wanted to curse you and they hired Balaam the prophet to curse you?

[16:06] And do you remember what happened? He couldn't curse you because I kept making him pronounce blessings. Do you remember how I turned the tables on him?

Do you remember how I brought you across the river Jordan onto dry land? And he's saying, how can these people who are Israelites call themselves Israelites if they've forgotten about Moses and Miriam and Aaron and Balaam and Balak and the journey to Gilgal?

How can they call themselves Israelites if they've forgotten what God has done for them? And that's the point, you see. God is not a concept. God is not an idea.

God is not a force. God is a person. God is a person. When Pascal was converted, I don't know if you know the story of Pascal's conversion.

He was a child protégé. He was a mathematical genius. He was in fact the inventor of the first computer. He didn't know it was a computer at the time. They wouldn't have called it that day but in the 17th century it was a mechanical calculator.

[17:15] The guy was a genius, an absolute genius but he'd been a nominal Christian. But on the evening of Monday the 23rd of November 1654, Pascal had a profound encounter with God.

He didn't talk about it very much. In fact, he didn't tell anyone. But he did write about it. He wrote it down on a piece of parchment and he sewed it into the lining of his jacket. He was 31 years of age and although he never spoke about it very much, he wrote it down.

It was discovered after his death. His sister looked in his jacket. There was something kind of in the lining. She discovered this. It's called Pascal. Pascal's memorial. This is what it says. Pascal became a great philosopher, a great scholar.

He was a very eloquent man. But when he encountered God, this is what he said. It's a bit disjointed because he wanted to capture what he experienced that night. Let me read it to you. Fire, fire, fire.

God of Abraham. God of Isaac. God of Jacob. Not of the philosophers and of the learned. The learned. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling.

[18:23] Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ. My God. And your God. God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus Christ.

God of Jesus Christ. And so he goes on. That's what he put inside his jacket. And every day, he remembered what had happened to him on Monday the 23rd of November of 1654. He carried it round with him as a memorial to the fact that God is not a concept.

God is not an idea. He is the living God and he is the God of people and of places. He is the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. He is the God of Bethel. These are monuments you can go to. These are places in geography and God has been there, God is saying to the people in Micah's day. God has left his footprints in the sands of time.

Oh my people, he says, remember, remember the righteous acts of God. That's what it says there in verse 5. Now how does all this apply to us, this side of the cross and the resurrection?

[19 : 32] Well, very, very much so. Because tonight, after we've sung a hymn, we will gather round this table and we will hear the words, as the bread and the wine is distributed, Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me.

And that is what the Lord's Supper is all about. The Lord's Supper is a cry from the heart of God to his people. Oh my people, oh my people. Chuck Colson, I'm reading some books of his in a minute. He once made this observation about the wine in the Lord's Supper and he said this, the world drinks to forget, the Christian drinks to remember. Isn't that right? The world drinks to forget, the Christian drinks to remember.

How important the Lord's Supper is. Which probably happens more often than we do, as often as you do this. As you drink, you show the Lord's death until he comes. Do you remember how in the Gospels Jesus went up the Mount of Transfiguration?

He's on this mountain, he's transfigured, his glory shines through the veil of his humanity. It's taken away and Jesus is seen for years, all glorious. He's on the Mount of Transfiguration and he's talking with Moses and Elijah.

[20 : 47] Peter, James and John can't believe it. They see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, the great summary of the Old Testament and Jesus is there and what are they talking about?

One of the Gospel writers tells us that the subject of that conversation was the exodus, the exodus that he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. So what has God ever done for us?

He has sent his son to set us free from our sins and he became flesh and blood in order to bleed and to die so that you might be set free from the slavery to sin and death and you might be brought into his kingdom, into his family and you might be called children of God and so all my people, oh my people, remember.

It's not just a fanciable idea, it's not just a nice thing to believe that makes life a little bit better because it doesn't. This is time and space that's happened in history God has literally put his footpins in the sands of time.

And so all my people, remember there is a green hill, I doubt there is a green hill, but there is a hill outside the city wall where God's dear son was crucified who died to save us all. This happened, remember.

[22 : 08] Look at verse 7. They respond and they say, don't they, shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul.

Does God require a human sacrifice? They're saying, aren't they, are all the human sacrifices not enough? Does he require a human sacrifice? Yes, he does. Can you offer it?

Can I offer it? No. Why can't you offer it? Because God has already done so. Because God has not spared his own son but gave him up for us all and how will he now not freely give us all things?

And so how are we to respond to that, what God has done for us in Christ in giving of his son? How are we to respond to that? What do we do with that when we get eventually to verse 8?

And we're ready to understand it, aren't we? What does God require of you and I in the light of what he's done for us? This is what God requires. Do justice.

[23 : 16] Love kindness and walk humbly with your God. Verse 8, he's shown you, oh man. Where has he shown you? Where has he shown you?

He's shown you in his dealings with Israel for a start. The calcitrant bunch, aren't they? The Israelites, they were stubborn, they were rebellious and yet how patiently God deals with them.

They keep on breaking his covenant and he sends them into exile and he brings them back from exile to the Lord. He's shown you that he is a just God who will do what he says.

He is a just God but he's also a saviour and he will punish sin but he will save sinners. He's shown you. Where?

Where has he shown you? Where do you see this? You see it ultimately at the cross. God at the cross. God at the cross where Jesus died.

[24 : 17] God shows his justice and his mercy. The cross is a revelation of the justice and the mercy of God. It shows us just like the way that God can remain just and yet be merciful to the likes of you and I.

How just is God? How righteous is God? Well he's so righteous so holy that when sin is found on his own son not because of what he's done but because it is placed on him by imputation when Jesus takes the sin of the world upon himself he is forsaken by God.

He cries out my God my God why have you forsaken me? That's how serious a thing sin is. That's how holy God is. That's how just God is. And yet the cross not only shows us the seriousness of sin and how righteous God is and how he will punish it it also shows us at the same time doesn't it how much God loves sin.

It's an old hymn isn't it? I've not sung it since I was growing up in Wales but payment God cannot twice demand first at my bleeding surety's hand and then again at mine.

God is just and the reason God is just because he's just he will not punish sin twice and if your sin has been laid on the Lord Jesus Christ it has been punished there he will not punish you for your sins.

[25 : 38] That would be unjust wouldn't it? That's why John says if we confess our sins if we own up to them if we own up to what we're really like tonight he is what?

What is God like? Well he's lovey-dovey and he'll sweep it all under the carpet and he'll say it doesn't matter no that's not what he's like at all. If we confess our sins God is faithful and he's just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

At the cross God's judgment and God's mercy they meet. At the cross God has found a way to be merciful to you and be merciful to me without compromising his justice.

what has God ever done for you? What has God ever done for me? He has given his son to die for me.

And so what should be my response? Love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all. And what will that look like?

[26 : 45] Well that's where you begin to act justly. And he began to love mercy and he began to walk humbly. In the 1970s E.D. Armin he was Ugandan president kind of totalitarian ruler if you've seen the film The Last King of Scotland it's kind of depiction of what he was like really.

And E.D. Armin murdered the Archbishop Janani Lawum. Janani Lawum he was the leader of the church in Uganda. E.D. Armin murdered him. Next to him for the job was a man called Amfesto Kivangari.

Amfesto Kivangari struggled with what he should do but he fled the country understandably. And during his exile Festo Kivangari wrote a book while Ammin was persecuting and killing Christians. During his exile Festo Kivangari wrote this book and the title of the book is a strange title. The title of the book is Why I Love E.D. Armin. And in that book Festo Kivangari he writes about his and expresses his longing for E.D. Armin that evil dictator to come to know the forgiveness of God. How can he write a book like that? How can he write a book like that when his best friend had been murdered by this tyrant? How can he write a book like that when so many atrocities were taking place when so many injustices were being afflicted?

[28 : 18] How can he write a book why I love E.D. Armin? Only because Festo Kivangari he himself knew the mercy of God and he recognized that he needed forgiving just like E.D. Armin needed forgiveness.

And here's the shocking truth we're all in the same boat aren't we? All of us human beings we're all in the same boat.

So offensive isn't it? We're all in the same boat and the boat is called the Titanic and we're all going down. And we all need I need you need God to be merciful to you.

We're all sinners in different ways. it'll show itself in different ways. And all of us need God to be merciful to us. And those who know the mercy of God will be those who show the mercy of God. And if you know the grace of God you will want to live it out in your relationships with others. It'll show itself not only in the way that you handle other human relationships which are close to you but it will show yourself in how you view public and societal issues.

[29 : 42] In a view of compassion. You'll want to act justly and show mercy. You'll want to walk humbly before God.

If you know God's grace God's you'll will be very reluctant to condemn. Nor will you want to condone isn't it?

You'll not be one of those pharisaic figures crying out what a terrible world we live in ringing up five live. You will recognize in your own heart there but for the grace of God go I.

And you will act justly and you will love mercy. Love it. And you'll walk humbly not arrogantly not proudly not in a superior way not in a patronizing way but humbly.

Because the Bible teaches us that God resists the proud but he gives grace to the humble. Like a magnet isn't it? You turn the magnet the wrong way around.

[30 : 57] I can never work out which way it is but you turn it around the wrong way and you can push the iron filings away can't you? But then you flick the magnet and the iron filings just are so attracted to it.

It's the same with pride isn't it? With the proud. God wants nothing to do with the proud. He resists them but with the humble he can't keep away from them. That's the micro challenge.

It's much more than we realise it's not a social gospel at all. It's got social implications massive ones. The challenge is to point to what God has done in human history through Christ and to proclaim Christ and to call people to respond to what Christ has done for them.

And so he has told you oh man oh IPC what is good and what does the Lord require of you. But to do justice to love kindness and more humbly with your God.