

SUNDAY 29th JANUARY 2023

The Lord defines what is good.

**Scripture: Micah 6:1-8 and Matt
5:1-12**



I wonder if you have ever explored your family tree, and if so, how far back have you been able to go?

Our two scriptures this morning were written 700 years apart. Micah's well known verse – do what is right, love mercy and walk humbly with your God – was expanded upon 700 years later, when Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount – the beatitudes. Pretty amazing. God showing consistency in His plan for us.

The Beatitudes are part of 5 Kingdom sermons that Matthew wrote for new believers, many of whom had converted from Judaism. These sermons parallel the 5 books of the law of Moses in the Old Testament and they reiterate what Micah presented in verse 8 – To do what is right, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

It is interesting to note the similarities. Micah was a simple country man with a heart for the ordinary people who were being exploited. He was especially concerned about idolatry, immorality, and injustice. Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth as a baby to a poor couple. Jesus had a heart full for justice, mercy and compassion and love for those who were being exploited.

Let's imagine we are sitting in a courtroom with several characters present.

We have God – the Judge who is holding the people to account to exact justice on them.

Micah is the counsel for the defence stating what the people have done and are willing to do.

God is also the prosecutor and the injured party as He recites the ways the people have wronged Him and others.

In Verse 3 God says: “what have I done to make you tired of me?”

Can you hear His frustration in that verse?

If God asked you – what have I done to you – how would you reply?

Have you ever had someone who you have helped many times, but they choose not to change or feel unable to. It can be so frustrating, and it seems they want to hang onto their issues or problems, and you end up wearing the blame?

In their defence Micah claims the people kept up the ritual and religious side – they had made sacrifices. Micah lets God know of the willingness of the people of Judah to continue to sacrifice to Him – yearling calves; 1000's of rams, 10,000 rivers of olive oil and perhaps even sacrificing their firstborn children to pay for their sins?

These are just excuses – we have offered sacrifices, but we can offer more!

Their responses mimic a pagan influence and that is why God said He could call the mountains as witnesses against the people, for the people held their pagan worships on top of mountains.

The people were clearly experiencing short term, perhaps even long-term memory loss. They had followed the One God, but in this situation, they forgot all that God had done for them and were considering, almost buying God's blessings and forgiveness.

Do you regularly give thanks to God for His goodness and mercy?

Do you ever look back over situations in your life, acknowledging God's past protection which helps you see His provision in the present?

Or do you rattle off excuses of what you have done and what you could do in the future – knowing full well you will not follow through.

God is calling the people of Judah to be “living” sacrifices – actively serving Him. God wants changed lives, people to be fair, just, merciful, and humble.

Micah, verse 8 is memorable but is usually taken out of context and used as pretexts. God always expressed His word at a particular time and to a particular place. That's why the Bible, unlike all other holy books in the world, is full of history and geography, not books of thoughts and words.

This was a time for the Israelites to wake up to what they were doing; to hear and respond to what God wants – not empty sacrifices or religious rituals but changed lives.

Justice can only go so far, but mercy takes over and goes further. God is the supreme master of both – He will always do justly, He will always be fair.

Micah's misery gives way to rejoicing when He realizes the judge – God is going to show mercy as well.

Let's skip ahead to Matthew. Jesus shares the words that were written for this specific time and place. Jesus is expanding on Micah verse 8 with the beatitudes, goes into more details to teach how believers are to live now that they are in the kingdom.

1. They are a code of ethics for all of us.
2. They contrast what is eternal and what is temporary.
3. They contrast superficial faith with real faith that Christ demands.
4. They show how the Old Testament expectations will be filled in the New Kingdom.
5. They are not multiple choice – they are to be taken as a whole.

Leading into Communion

I will finish the sermon at the Communion table.

It can be challenging to be just and merciful, except under one circumstance. Where an innocent person is prepared to suffer the justice on behalf of the guilty.

Then the sin can be punished and pardoned at the same time. We have seen this at the cross, where God's perfect justice (the death penalty for sins) is exacted and God's perfect mercy (the guilty go free) because the innocent one – Jesus – has paid the price.

If God forgave us without the cross – He would be merciful but not just. If He refused to forgive sin and punished us, then He would be just but not merciful.

We gather around our Communion table, remembering all that Jesus, the Son of God has done for us.

I want to challenge all of us this morning, following on from what we have learnt from our two readings.

It seems unbelievable to me that the people of Judah would respond to God in the way they did. Perhaps, we too, have been guilty of memory-loss – forgetting or ignoring all that God has done for us in the past. We then become self-centred.

We need to take our eyes from ourselves and turn our eyes upon Jesus. To look outside of ourselves to Him, and in doing so, recognising what God really wants – a changed person. Someone who is fair, just, merciful, and humble.

In your efforts to serve God ask yourself this morning:

1. Am I fair in my dealings with others?
2. Do I show mercy to others even when they have wronged me?
3. Am I learning to show humility?
4. Can I remember the beatitudes – perhaps writing them down in your own words to help you remember and practice.

God is looking for us to be living, active disciples – serving Him and serving others.

Prayer for the Emblems.