

“Tucked Away in the Bible: VII - Micah”
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Micah 6:1-8

Well, here we are. We’ve arrived at the seventh and final sermon of this series, “Tucked Away in the Bible - Little or Lesser Known Books of the Bible.” I’ve enjoyed working on it and discovering new things along the way. I hope you’ve enjoyed it too. I think you have, because I’ve gotten a lot of comments about it. And I appreciate that. And what’s even better is that many of you have mentioned to me that you’ve gone home and read these books after the sermon. And even better - some of you have come and talked to me about these scripture passages! A pastor’s dream - to be able to whet the appetite of people to want to know more!

At any rate, the final “tucked away” book we’re going to explore is one that is tucked away in the pages of the Hebrew scriptures - it’s Micah. When I did my usual quiz this week as I have in all the others, I discovered that many people knew about Micah - and mostly because of his very memorable words: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?”

So Micah. Micah was a prophet from a small village called Moresheth, who prophesied in the same era as Hosea, Isaiah and Amos. It was an era where the prosperity of the chosen people was about to come to an end. There had been forty years of good times, but it was all about to fall apart.

As one writer put it, “During times of prolonged prosperity and peace, people often forget God, ignore God, drift away from God. People got caught up in ‘the good life’ for forty years and slowly began to forget God and His ways.” (On-line, “Sermons from Seattle,” Edward Markquart)

Micah was one of the people who rose up and railed against them. He spoke on behalf of those who were being abused and forgotten - like poor tenant farmers, almost enslaved by their greedy landowners, and others. As writer Angela Ying pointed out, “Micah saw the injustices going on in society, was quite willing to name them by right name and felt called to address the ones in power and to speak against evils that were no longer tolerable.” She concludes, “Most, if not all of the leadership, were preoccupied and caught up in matters of comfort, prosperity and security.” (On-line, Angela Ying)

As you can hear, things were way out of kilter. The people of God had forgotten who they were and whose they were, and God was tired of it, and Micah told them so. Through Micah, God lets the people know how disappointed He is in them. He reminds them that it was God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, it was God who gave them freedom, it was God who made them who they were. That's how the sixth chapter begins.

Then it's as if Israel and Judah speak. "Well, what can we do to make it right? Should we come before him with offerings and sacrifices? Would that make it right? Is that what God wants?"

"No," Micah answers, and then comes that memorable passage. "No, God has already told you what He wants, how He wants you to live, what is good. Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God."

That's it. Plain and simple. That was the thing to which Micah was calling the people to return - the way God wanted them to live.

Okay, now fast forward a couple of thousand years, to 2009, and tell me - would Micah have a word to say to the people of God today? I think so. While, obviously a lot of things have changed, so too have many remained the same. People today too often forget God, ignore God, drift away from God. We spend too much time focusing on ourselves, looking out for number one. We forget that God's instructions for living are fairly straightforward - do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

So in order to reconnect with God's desires for us, I want us to spend a little time thinking on those things this morning - those ways God asks us to live. First, doing justice.

Justice is a big issue for God. From the first pages of scripture to the last, God is about justice, and especially for the weak and defenseless in society. Jesus talked about the importance of caring for the widow and the fatherless, and he had a big place in his heart for those who were outcasts, on the outside of society looking in.

Too often, we tend to look at justice as what is fair for people, and especially for ourselves. We tend to think about justice in legal terms. Like this - One day Supreme Court Justice Horace Gray had a man who appeared before him in a lower court, and somehow he escaped conviction on a technicality. As he stood before Judge Gray prior to his release back into society, the judge said this to the man: "I know that you are guilty and you know it too, and I wish you to remember that one day you will stand before a better and wiser Judge, and that there you will be dealt

with according to justice and not according to law.” (On-line, Sermon Illustrations.com) That’s the way we tend to think about justice, isn’t it? What’s right and what’s wrong? What’s fair and what’s not?

Well, to some extent, that is what God is concerned about, but here in this passage I think it’s bigger than that. It is doing justice with an eye toward making sure there is justice for those who can’t do it for themselves.

It’s the justice that made Jesus make sure children were allowed to come to him, while others tried to keep them away. It’s the justice that made Jesus reach out to those whom society condemned, like the woman caught in adultery and the tax collector up a tree.

It’s the justice that made a woman named Rosa Parks stay in her seat when a bus driver was trying to force her to the back of the bus because of her race.

It’s the justice that makes many of us give of ourselves, and our time and our money to care for those living on the streets of Elkton during their time in the Rotating Shelter.

That’s the kind of justice God wants us to do - a justice that seeks to lift up those whom life has pushed down. Will you do that? It’s what God requires of you.

Secondly, love kindness. The world back in Micah’s day needed kindness, and oh, how our world needs it. You and I could tell story after story of how unkind the world can be. Let me just give you one example this morning.

It is actually something that I witnessed not too long ago. I was sitting at a stop light about ten cars back in line, and cars were coming along in the opposite direction, across the median strip from me. All of a sudden two cars came around the corner - first a big huge van, then right behind it an SUV. Right before my eyes, all of a sudden, the driver of the big huge van hit her brakes hard, and then bang! The SUV slammed right into her! I could hardly believe my eyes! Wait, it gets worse!

After the impact, the driver of the van turned around and made an ugly face and gesture to the driver of the SUV, yelled something I couldn’t hear - then she put the van in drive and took off! Just took off! There was no damage to her vehicle.

Well, I put two and two together, and figured out that the driver of the SUV had done something to that woman - tailgated her or cut her off or something - but that was how she responded. (Just to finish the story, his SUV wasn’t too badly damaged. He pulled off the road for a second, just enough to let a few other cars get

between him and her, and then off he went down the road!) What's this world coming to?

Kindness seems to be in short supply sometimes these days. But it doesn't need to be. It's a matter of trying, it's a matter of being aware, it's a matter of caring, it's a matter of living in the likeness of Jesus - who was loving and kind and compassionate at every turn.

So let me tell you about how easy it can be to be kind, and what a great effect it can have, by way of an experience I had recently. It happened to me a couple of weeks ago. Melinda Grablis, Sandy Wherry and I went out to Kansas recently for a training event where 1700 people participated. It was phenomenal. Well, one day, during our lunch break, Melinda and I were sitting at a table under the huge tent where they fed this enormous crowd. We were waiting for the serving lines to open, as were many others. While we were waiting three women came up and asked if they could sit down at our table, and we said "sure." We all had nametags on with our names and hometowns on them, and I noticed that one of the women was from Texas. So I began to talk to her, to tell her that I know a DS from Texas, and maybe she knew her. Well, no she didn't, since Texas alone has five annual conferences within its borders. My friend is a DS in Houston, and this woman told me she was from Dallas.

"Oh," I said, "my best friend is from Fort Worth." "Really," she replied, "I'm from Fort Worth." Since we were at a church conference, I added, "She grew up going to Birdville Baptist Church." "Oh," she replied, "I know that church, but actually I'm from Holtam City." Well, I'm sure my jaw dropped, because that's exactly where my friend Linda and her husband grew up.

I said, "You're kidding. Linda and Hugh are from Holtam City." "What are their names?" she asked. So I told her, and lo and behold, she went to high school with both of them. We couldn't believe it! So I whipped out my cell phone, got Linda on the line, and the two of them talked and recounted past days of glory.

Isn't that amazing, that out of 1700 people attending a conference, that woman would sit down at my table? I'm so glad that I had the opportunity just to talk to her, because in the talking a reunion was begun.

That's kindness, isn't it? Talking to strangers, sharing your story, finding what you have in common instead of always seeing how we're different.

Kindness - pure and simple. God says, "Love kindness." So, will you do it? It's what God requires of you. Kindness can change everything, and kindness, best of all, reminds the recipient and indeed, the giver, of God's love and grace.

Finally, walk humbly with your God. Keep things in proper perspective - you are you and God is God, and best of all, you are God's. As one preacher put it, "Walking humbly is to neither have your nose up in the air nor your shoulders slouched over your feet. To walk humbly is to not exalt yourself, to not worry or be bothered by other people's opinion of you. To walk humbly is not to be above someone else or below someone else, but with someone." (On-line, Angela Ying)

"Maybe," she concluded, "walking humbly with God is about paying attention, paying attention to who we are and what is around us."

I think she's right, that what God wants of us is to pay attention to our relationship with Him especially, and to remember who we are and whose we are. It's two-way, not one-way, as unfortunately, our society encourages us to be. Our society teaches us to "take care of number one" and look out for ourselves before all else. Our society does not look kindly on humility.

How easily we fall into the traps of ego! Walter Cronkite wrote about an incident in his life that proves this so well. Apparently, one day he and his wife were sailing down the Mystic River in Connecticut, which apparently is filled with tricky turns and some shallow spots. At some point, they came upon another boat which was filled with young people, who looked in their direction, and shouted and waved their arms. Cronkite waved back a cheery greeting and his wife said to him, "Do you know what they were shouting?" "Why yes," Cronkite replied, "it was 'Hello, Walter!'" "No," his wife said, "they were shouting, 'Low water! Low water!'" See how easy it is?!

It even happens to preachers. Consider the preacher who wrote a fabulous sermon on humility but decided to wait until he had a big crowd to preach it! See how easy it is?!

Yet, as children of a good God, we are called to something different, to humility. A man named Hudson Taylor understood that, and did it. He was a missionary and was called to speak at a large Presbyterian Church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service rose to introduce him, and did so in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in his years of service, and then presented him as "our illustrious guest." Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then opened his message by saying, "Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master." (On-line, Sermon Illustrations.com)

Walking humbly.

And finally, this. Many years ago, a Christian professor at the University of

Edinburgh by the name of Stuart Blackie, was listening to his students as they presented oral readings. When one of his students, a young man rose to begin his reading, he held his book in the wrong hand. Blackie thundered, "Take your book in your right hand, and be seated!" At the harsh rebuke, the student held up his right arm. He didn't have a right hand! The other students squirmed in their seats and looked down at the floor. For a moment the professor hesitated. Then he made his way over to the student, put his arm around him, and with tears coming from his eyes, said, "I'm sorry. I never knew. Please, will you forgive me?" His humble apology made a lasting impression on the young man, because some time after that, someone was telling the story in a gathering, and the young man stood up and said, "I was that student. Professor Blackie led me to Christ, because of what he did that day - he made the wrong right."

Friends, in the end, isn't that what we all want? That we live our lives in such a way that people will want to know the Christ who is in us. They will - if we heed the words of Micah and the desires of our God - by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God. So, will you do it? Amen.