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What Does the Lord Require?
Micah 6:1-8

The last few pages of the Old Testament are what we call the *Minor Prophets*. They aren't really minor, just short, and Micah is one of them. Micah was an 8th century BC prophet of the marketplace, he spoke on behalf of the poor and weak people in Judean society. He prophesied during a time of economic prosperity, but great social injustice—The gap between rich and poor was huge, wealthy landowners took advantage of the peasants, and many priests and prophets viewed their ministry like a business instead of a calling.

It was a time when people could *talk the talk* of faith, but not walk the walk. Their faith didn't guide the way they treated one another, or the world. They were keeping up appearances, like the Pharisees in the New Testament who could pray the best prayers, but ignore the needy widows and orphans at their doors.

Chapter 6 is like a *mini-lawsuit* against an ungrateful people, with Micah acting as God the plaintiff's attorney, and all creation are witnesses.

God wants to know *why they are acting this way*—don't they remember all that has been done for them? All the times they've been rescued, like when King Balak was unable to get Balaam to curse them, and when at Shittim and Gilgal they were able to miraculously cross the Jordan River, just like the Red Sea?

The people's *response* is frustrating, "What more do you want from us? Thousands of sacrifices? A human sacrifice? Hey, we're doing fine!"

And then comes the response from the prophet:

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?

It is such a *timely* message. For many there is a feeling of grief over a *loss of faith* in our nation. A feeling that as a country we were once a Christian people and now we are not, and therefore, we have all the problems we now face.

That point can be *argued* from many sides—for we were also established as a nation to give people religious freedom—not all were Christian, and we were not established to make people Christian.

But we can argue that the nation used to cater much more to *Christian beliefs*. Blue laws were not that long ago, leaving people without much to do on Sundays besides go to church.. Little league sports didn't usually play on Sundays and Wednesdays because those were church nights.

Now we are a very *secular society*.

None of the many diverse religions receive much respect from society. Christianity will ultimately be a minority religion in North America, and the majority religion in places like Africa before too long. The world is changing. We do not live in a Christian country.

There is also much grief over the loss of gentility and *civility*. Over times when even those who thought differently could eat together, And still be friends. Now are an increasingly harsh, critical, *violent* society.

We could mourn this fact, and be depressed.
Or we can praise God for the opportunity to *truly practice* our faith!
To really make a difference in this world that needs people of faith.
If we walk the walk, not just talk the talk,
In this increasingly harsh and critical world, we will make a difference!

And how do we *practice our faith*? How do we follow God's will?

Some people think of it as a *bullseye* target that we need to hit.
That God's will is always something very specific.
But if we look to the Bible, God's will for us is also laid out like *a way of life*.
As Pastor Joan Gray puts it, it's like a *river current*, that we choose to join.

Throughout the Bible we find important *summaries* of God's will for our lives.
Verses that say who God is, and what God expects from the people—

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength and your neighbor as yourself is another one...the **Greatest Commandment** according to Jesus.

Hear O Israel the Lord your God is one...the **Shema** from Deuteronomy.

Micah 6:8 is another key verse. It is a 3-fold way of life,
Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Three character traits of the people of God. Three descriptions of God.
Three things that must go together...and that have the possibility of changing our world.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, *walking humbly* with God is an essential character trait. As people of God we are to act without pretense, as servants of one another, willing to be last instead of first. Jesus is the prime example for us because he humbled himself in the ultimate way by dying for us on the cross. He showed us humility by washing his disciples' feet, living without pretense, and relying completely upon God. What would it say to the world if we would serve one another? If we were always willing to be last, not first? If we lived without any pretense at all?

To *love kindness*, or *mercy* as many translations read, is another character trait of God's people throughout the Bible. Also known as 'loving kindness', It's used to describe a covenantal relationship. And it's often talking about an *unexpected, undeserved* kindness or mercy.

The key to loving kindness is 'to *love*' *it*. We may find ourselves being kind, but we do not always *love* to be kind. Sometimes it is forced. Sometimes it is simply keeping up appearances, or using good manners. Sometimes it is an obligation. But this verse is telling us God wants us to be kind *out of love*.

The Bible says a lot about *unexpected kindness, undeserved kindness*—the kind that comes out of love. Another name for this is *grace*.

Remember the father's response to the return of the **prodigal** son?
He ran and kissed and welcomed him with open arms!
Remember who helped the poor man **injured** on the side of the road.
Not a priest or a Jew, but a Samaritan!
Remember what happened to the woman who was to be stoned for **adultery**?
Jesus stooped down before her, not to throw a stone,
but to graciously forgive her and send her away to sin no more.
Again and again we see undeserved, unexpected kindness—mercy,
Loving kindness. Grace.

What would happen if you popped into your *office* offering true grace?
If you treated your *parents and children* with real loving kindness?
If you offered to those in this place, and outside these *walls* kindness—out of love?
Humility, kindness, and finally, *justice*.

Justice is so important in the Bible it's found 421 times in the OT alone!

But this is perhaps the most difficult of the three because of our middle class American context. Many of us do not have a lot of experience with true injustice. We do not usually describe our lives as unjust, and as a result we do not see a God of justice as meaningful and important. In fact, we might see the *justice and judgment of God* as something cruel and mean. Because we can only think in terms of arbitrary judgment (the human kind, not divine).

Instead of describing God as 'just', we just want to call God 'loving'.

But to those who have experienced injustice (which is the majority of our world), a just God is a very meaningful and powerful God, a God who is near and dear to the heart and soul.

And to be honest, a *just God is the God of the Bible*—Old and New Testaments. God is just—God comes to make what is wrong, right again. We can fall into the false belief that the OT God is one of judgment and wrath, and the NT God is one of grace and love. But it's not true. Grace is present throughout the Scriptures. Justice is too.

And the justice in the Old Testament is a *specific justice*. God does get upset with the people—when they wrong those who are powerless and weak, and when they worship other gods. God doesn't go around zapping people arbitrarily or for any little mistake.

And think about this—
the Old Testament—it's what was in the *mind and heart of our Lord Jesus*.
The Old Testament is what shaped Jesus—he had it committed to memory!
We cannot discount it, or we will be discounting Jesus himself!

(Fleming Rutledge, 2007, 30 Good Minutes).

Justice is an important character trait of God, and God's people.
Justice is God seeing something wrong, and setting it right.
Justice is God's people working on behalf of those who are wronged.

On the *cross* we see how justice comes together with kindness and humility in the person of Jesus Christ.

There are *9 words associated* with the word 'justice' in the Bible—all words that tell us who we are to help when we fight for justice. The words are widow, fatherless, orphans, poor, hungry, weak, oppressed, stranger, and needy.

Do you remember me talking about a brave Pastor named ***Dietrich Bonhoeffer*** who ministered during WWII? He actually participated in plots to assassinate Hitler, which led to his arrest, imprisonment, and eventual execution. But not before he had written some of the most powerful words about justice, kindness, and humility ever to be recorded. His writings and his life stand as a testimony to the power of living in faith, and daring to fight for justice on behalf of those in need.

The list is long of those who are ***hurting in our world today***. We have children at Mills who cannot read, people starving or dying of AIDS in Malawi, shut-ins receiving Meals on Wheels, kids bullied at school and on the internet, children and teens being subjected to human trafficking right here in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

What if ***you and I worked*** against injustice?
Which one captures your heart and mind?
Who is God calling YOU to speak up for?

Justice is also about simply acting honestly, fairly, and with integrity, In your everyday life, In the small dealings with a friend or neighbor, and with the big business deals, or major contracts. It's about doing what is right, and not taking advantage of anyone.

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?

We live in a world that is starving for this kind of light and life.
What will we offer?
What will we do?
Amen.