

What the Lord Requires (Micah 6)

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Of the production of courtroom TV shows there is no end. On the rare occasion when I've been home sick and turned on the TV during the day, I've learned you can practically take your pick: The People's Court, Judge Judy, Judge Joe Brown, Judge Mathis. We seem to have an infatuation with the juicy details of other people's problems.

I also think the reason for our interest runs deeper. There's something in the heart of every human being that longs for justice. It's part of being created in God's image. Creation itself testifies that all we can see is not all there is, that there is a God in heaven who rules over the cosmos and to whom we are accountable.

Rom 1:20, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

We can suppress that knowledge. We can ignore that awareness. But it has an uncanny way of outing itself through the desires of our heart, justice included. We instinctively know that right and wrong are real things. Even if we define them in a thousand different ways, our collective hunger for right to prevail and wrong to be punished doesn't go away.

Something about the concept of a courtroom, the accountability it exudes, the justice it represents, resonates in our hearts. It's also what makes the context of Micah 6 so arresting. In this chapter, God takes his people to court. He summons witnesses and issues an indictment in vv. 1-5. He reviews the requirements of the law in vv. 6-8. And he renders a verdict in vv. 9-16. He's both the prosecuting attorney and the judge.

Here's the divinely intended effect of the entire case. The Lord wants to connect three things in Israel's mind no less than our own – past mercies, future judgment, and present obedience. Why? **Because past mercies and future judgment compel the present obedience God requires.**



A humble heart of grateful obedience is the goal. V. 8, “What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” The legal argument the Lord makes to that end is an argument in three stages. We need to feel the weight of each element no less than Israel.

1) REMEMBER THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE LORD (vv. 1-5)

The command to “hear” at the beginning of v. 1 marks the beginning of the third and final section of the book of Micah. It’s also plural – calling Israel to listen, to pay attention. The summons to “arise” and “plead your case” is singular. The Lord seems to be exhorting Micah to speak on his behalf. Micah immediately complies in v. 2. “Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has an indictment against his people...”

Through the mouth of the prophet, the Lord calls the courtroom of creation to order, inviting the highest of heights (mountains) and the deepest of depths (foundations) to bear witness to the truth of his charge. Why? Because as Isa 66:1 says, “heaven is his throne” and “the earth is his footstool.” This isn’t a tribal or local deity speaking. This is the Creator and King of the universe, the Lord of Hosts with whom all people have to do – you and me included.

And the fact he has an “indictment” to bring, a legal accusation of transgression, tells us two things. **First, it assumes the existence and normative character of God’s moral law.** The God who created the world and everything in it is perfectly holy. He is the moral standard. Apart from him, there is no moral foundation for ethical claims of any sort, no universal standard of law to form the legal basis of an indictment. It’s the foundation of the whole concept of justice.

Second, the presence of an indictment tells us God is not indifferent, disengaged, or uninvolved in the affairs of men. He’s watching. He’s observing. He’s paying attention. Why? Because he requires his creatures to conform to the moral standard, which means God is also perfectly just. We cannot escape or avoid God’s justice. His justice is the very definition of justice.

So what’s the indictment? V. 3, “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me!” We know from Micah 1-3 that the people of Israel had completely turned their back on the Lord. The social injustice in their land reflected

a heart that was far from him. He called and drew them to himself, but they committed spiritual adultery, went after other gods, and hated their neighbor accordingly.

So the Lord endeavors to convict them with a rhetorical question. “Is there anything I did to deserve this? Am I responsible on any level for your rejection of my authority? Did I wrong you in some way? Have I been unfaithful to you in any respect? Answer? No. And the mountain of evidence in vv. 4-5 confirms as much! V. 4, “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery.”

Centuries prior to Micah’s day, the people of Israel were grievously suffering under Egyptian taskmasters bent on destroying them. They even tried to kill all their male infants! But the Lord intervened and rescued them with a strong arm of salvation. He judged the hosts of Egypt with ten plagues. He parted the waters of the Red Sea. He brought his people through on dry ground.

Though it occurs near the beginning of Israel’ story, the prophets refer back to it again and again as the definitive example God’s faithfulness to marvelously save his people, even when all the odds are stacked against them. It’s why the Lord uses the word “you” and not “them” in v. 4 even though he’s speaking to Israelites living 700 years afterward. I didn’t bring “them” up. I brought “you” up. It’s your story, guys. I miraculously intervened in your life.

Christian, do you not have immeasurably more reason to say the same? They looked back on the exodus. We look back on the cross of Christ, the empty tomb, the climax of God’s saving acts. Deliverance from slavery in Egypt points forward to the day Jesus delivered us from slavery to sin and death! Has he not been good to you? Has he not given you the joy of being justified, sanctified, adopted, and made new through the power of the gospel? If Israel had compelling reasons to live for the Lord, do you not have far more?

Has the Lord not provided for you through the example, care, and leadership of his people? V. 4, “I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Mariam.” Has the Lord not protected you from physical and spiritual harm again and again, sovereignly causing all things to work together for your good? Israel’s story in Num 22 is our story.

On the way to the promised land of Canaan, a king of Moab named Balak tried to destroy Israel. To secure an advantage in the fight, he offered to pay a man named Balaam a princely sum to put a spell on Israel, to curse them so they would lose the battle. Three times he summoned Balaam, and three times Balaam basically said, though I really want your money, "I cannot curse that which God has blessed," and wound up pronouncing a blessing over Israel!

"Do you remember that, Israel?" the Lord says. And how about what happened "from Shittim to Gilgal" (v. 5) when you crossed the Jordan river? Because it was spring, the river was at flood stage, a raging torrent. Joshua told the priests carrying the ark of the covenant, the physical symbol of the Lord's presence among his people, to step off the bank and into the water. When they did, he parted the waters of the Jordan just like the Red Sea, causing the inhabitants of Canaan, Jericho included, to tremble in fear.

Salvation from Egypt at the beginning, salvation at the Jordan near the end, and deliverance from evil in the middle. Christian, if you are trusting and following Jesus as your Savior, that's your story too! Ps 121:7-8, "The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore." And he says to you today the same thing he said to Israel: Remember, O my people! Remember, KingsWay, that you may "know the righteous acts of the Lord."

Do you know what's the single most spiritually dangerous thing we ever do? We forget. We start thinking, "Man, what has God done for me lately. Not much. I'm still sick. I'm still single. I'm still under-employed." And we begin to think and act and feel as if God's righteous acts have ceased to exist! May it not be so, brothers and sisters!

Dale Davis is right. "Israel is to 'know' these acts, not merely as pieces of data, but as the combined evidence of his grace that claims their repentance and obedience. To 'remember' involves the same; it is not mere recollection; remembrance refers to what grips you and moves you and drives you."

What should grip and move and drive us? The good news of the cross and the empty tomb! The stubborn fact that the Lord is the God who saves, a righteous God

who makes things right, delivering us from our enemies again and again. And his past mercies make a claim on our life!

2) RESPOND WITH A HUMBLE HEART OF OBEDIENCE (vv. 6-8)

The question in v. 6 is the most important question you will ever answer. “With what shall I come before the LORD?” In response to all he has done, especially the good news of the gospel, how then shall we live? How are you going to relate to your Maker, to the Transcendent God who formed you in your mother’s womb?

There are different approaches. Micah captures one of the most common in vv. 6-7. It’s a response that acknowledges on some level our guilt before God on account of our sin. But instead of casting ourselves on his mercy in Jesus we try to buy him off. We try to be a good person, or at least a better person than the people we see on the news!

We say to ourselves, “Maybe I can come before him with “burnt offerings.” I’ll show God all the sacrificial ways I give up my time and money to help other people. Or maybe I can please him with “thousands of rams.” It won’t happen quickly. But if I keep at it, by the end of my days, I should have enough good deeds to buy my way into God’s presence.

In v. 7, Israel increases the value of their sacrifices to the point of absurdity. How about ten thousand rivers of oil? Or how about we offer up firstborn sons on the altar? Two of her kings – Ahaz and Manasseh – actually did it. They sacrificed their own children to the pagan god Molech in a demonic effort to try and “earn” his favor.

Friends, here’s the truth of the gospel. There is only one price sufficient to earn access into the presence and favor of God. It’s a price only God could pay. It’s a price God has paid. It’s the blood of his only Son. The cultic sacrifices and offerings God required under the Old Covenant were never meant to teach Israel that all they had to do was pay an entry fee. The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin! They all pointed forward to the day Jesus “appeared once for all...to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:28).

There's nothing you can give God or do for God to blot out the stain of your guilt. Salvation is of the Lord! He doesn't ask you to earn his favor. He asks you to rightly respond to the saving favor he offers you through Jesus! That's what the Lord requires. It's a response to the salvation he has already won for us. For make no mistake, the good news of the gospel requires a response. It's the obedience of faith!

V. 8, "He has told you, O man, 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?"

God doesn't want or need you to give him something else. He wants you – a living sacrifice! He requires nothing less than the offering of a life that responds to the salvation he has lavished on you in Jesus by wholeheartedly submitting to his authority in what you think, feel, and do. V. 8 isn't salvation by works in disguise. It's how we express our faith in the work Christ has done for us. It's what genuine faith looks like.

We don't get to decide what "works" for us or what we "think" is right or acceptable in his sight. "He has told you, O man, what is good." God tells us what faith looks like! **First, it means we "do justice."** What does it mean to "do justice"? It means relating to the people around you in accordance with God's Word.

In a negative sense, it means not doing the wicked things Israel was doing. Stop oppressing people through violence and dishonesty. Stop using "wicked scales" and "deceitful weights." Stop stealing land from your neighbors. Stop corrupting the legal system to cover your tracks.

In a positive sense, it means treating people in accordance with the dignity God has given them as those who bear his image! It means practicing compassion. Practicing generosity. Practicing a love that pushes back on the effects of sin in a broken world. All of the one-another commands in Scripture are part of how we "do justice."

When it comes to doing justice, we are chiefly responsible for how we personally relate to the people around us – to our family, our friends, our coworkers, the clerk who helps you at the grocery store or the TSA agent inspecting your luggage. The Lord will also give some of us a position of influence from which we can impact



broader social systems and structures. They too are easily corrupted by injustice because they are built and maintained by people like us who need a Savior!

However, that doesn't mean you are responsible for doing something to rectify every injustice you see on the evening news. Social media has a pernicious way of wrongly labelling anyone who fails to express "outrage" about injustice is part of the problem. Friends, only Jesus can make all things new. If I felt "outrage" about every injustice on planet earth all the time I would have no tears left to shed. The breadth of your grief is not the measure of your godliness.

But something is terribly wrong if our hearts only grieve the injustices that affect us or our family or our social circle and not the sorrows that afflict others. The evangelical response to injustice readily succumbs to a selfish individualism that doesn't really care about sorrows impacting people who are not like us. Or we presume whatever "those people" are all worked up about is their own fault and sing the glories of personal responsibility.

Scripture certainly emphasizes our personal responsibility to God and man, but slogans like "get a job" or "just do what the officer said" reflect neither a biblical doctrine of sin nor the compassion Jesus practiced toward the weak and downtrodden. Prov 31:8-9, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." The Lord commands us to contend for justice for the poor and needy in whatever sphere of influence he has placed us.

But let's not turn every opportunity into a responsibility or use the opportunities God has given us to advocate for justice to build towers of virtue from which we demean the young mom spending 150% of her energy "doing justice" within the four walls of her home or the single woman caring for her disabled brother as if that's not "enough." Gal 6:10 strikes the right balance. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." Genuine faith is characterized by doing justice.

Second, it means we "love kindness" or "steadfast love." The Lord is concerned that we treat people in the right way (justice) motivated by the right heart (steadfast love). Loving kindness means loving what God loves and feeling toward other people what God feels.

It means we remain faithful through thick and thin, overlooking faults, making charitable judgments, forgiving one another, and caring for one another, even when it costs us dearly. Loving kindness is all about the attitude behind our actions, imitating the way God has loved us in the way we love one another.

Third, it means we “walk humbly” with our God. Right actions and right attitudes are rooted in a right relationship with God that makes it all possible, a relationship characterized by humility. It means we submit to his authority in every area of life – work, relationships, entertainment, sexuality – instead of asserting our own.

It means not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, acknowledging our dependence, our sinfulness, and our continual need for the Spirit’s power in our lives. It means not treating God as someone who “owes” us but rather as One to whom we owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly. That’s what the Lord requires. That’s how we respond to the mercy He has lavished on us in Jesus – with a humble heart of obedience in the way we relate to him and one another. We remember his righteous acts, we respond with a heart of obedience, finally...

3) REVERE THE JUDGE WHO WILL NOT LEAVE THE GUILTY UNPUNISHED (vv. 9-16)

God’s mercy in the past compels our present obedience. So do his promised judgments in the future. In v. 9, the Lord shifts roles from prosecutor to judge as he prepares to announce the verdict. His judgments merit our attention, my friends. Why? Because they are the rod that prevails over all others! V. 9, “It is sound wisdom to fear your name.” So if v. 8 is the legal standard, how does Israel measure up?

They are stubbornly unrepentant. They have embraced the exact opposite of what the Lord requires. V. 10, “Can I forget any longer the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed?” V. 12, “Your rich men are full of violence...” And lest we think the problem is limited to the social elites: “Your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.” It’s not a

corporate America problem. It's a human problem plaguing every social class then and now.

The divine verdict arrives in v. 13. "Therefore I strike you with a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins." The consequences of sin are personal. God himself personally brings them to pass. He executes justice as a righteous Judge and King. In the rest of the chapter, he details the utter futility and deprivation Israel will experience on account of her rebellion.

Therein lies a warning to all who persist in oppressing others through unrepentant sin. And therein lies our hope for all who suffer injustice at the hands of wicked men. King Jesus will not allow it to prevail. He will personally see to it that the wicked are punished. In the end, no one will get away with anything.

In a fallen world, we must fix our hope in the God of justice, otherwise all our efforts to do justice will be plagued and ultimately corrupted by a self-sufficient, self-righteous spirit that tries to do God's job for him. What may start out as a desire to help someone grow and change that quickly shifts into a crusade to make them change, to force them to change. And if they don't move fast enough or far enough, we turn a cold shoulder instead of turning the other cheek.

Do not try and do God's job for him, friends, or pressure other people to do God's job for him. "Vengeance is mine," declares the Lord. You will only be able to tirelessly do justice, by contending through your personal example and influence for every image bearer to be treated according to Gods' moral norms, if your eyes remain fixed in the darkness of this world on the dawn of Christ's return when every mouth will be silence and the whole world held accountable to him.

CONCLUSION

Even in the warning, the Lord refuses to wash his hands of them completely. Desolation and scorn Israel received in abundance at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians on account of her sin. Yet what does God say they remain at the very end of the chapter? They remain "my people."

Yes, we must revere the judge who will not leave the guilty unpunished. And at the same time, he is the One in whom we hope. The One whom we trust. The One to



whom we come and cast ourselves on his mercy. Why? Because he is a God of justice. And he is also a God of mercy. He wounds. And he heals.

All who refuse in this life to humbly receive his offer of pardon in Jesus will be eternally punished. But as long as your heart is beating, it's never too late to turn. Even if you've been running away from him for decades, the Lord longs to be gracious to you. He rises to show you compassion. He directs your gaze to his past mercies. He directs your gaze to his future judgments. That he might compel you to embrace the present obedience of faith he requires.

Do not presume upon his mercy, friend. Respond to his saving acts in Jesus with a cry for salvation. And rejoice as the Spirit empowers you hour by hour, day by day, to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God until the day he graciously brings you home. That, brothers and sisters, is what the Lord requires.