12-29-24

Micah 6:1-8

As we mentioned before, the prophet Micah is speaking to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Their sin and rebellion against God have become intolerable. God has just about reached the end of His patience with His people. Out of His great mercy and love, He is still sending prophets like Micah to plead with the people to turn to Him. But the destruction of Israel is imminent and the destruction of Judah will take place in a couple more centuries.

And we must remember this about God as He said in Genesis 6:3, “*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.*” God is far more merciful than any of us deserve, but there will come a time when, without Christ, we will reach the end of God’s mercy; and this can be applied to individuals, nations, and one day, it will apply to the world. In Psalm 46:10 God tells us, “*Cease striving and know that I am God*.” In other words, quit fighting Him and submit to His will; one day He will cease striving and the only ones around Him will be those who have submitted to Him in Christ.

In our verses for today, God has basically set up a court room scene. The people of Israel seem to have something against God and God has a case against His people. He calls on the mountains and the foundations of the earth to hear. These are solid and unmoving; they have been there since creation and they have seen everything. When the people or God present their case to them, they will have already witnessed everything and they will know who is right. Although the mountains and hills are silent witnesses, the people will know that everything God presents is true.

God invites the people to explain to the mountains what their problem is with God. We don’t hear anything from the people at that point because, really, what can they say. Even in this short book of Micah, it goes back and forth between a warning of coming judgement due to their lack of faith and idolatry and injustice; and God’s promises of healing for them. God wants them to turn to Him, but they will not have it.

In verse 2, the Lord calls to the mountains to hear what He has to say. He has a case against His people Israel. Again, the mountains have seen everything, they know what God has done for Israel and that He has been completely faithful to them. So, with the mountains and the foundations of the earth listening, God asks His people what He has done to them and how He has wearied them. Then He demands an answer.

Clearly, no reasonable answer can be forthcoming. God has been nothing but good to His people and faithful to all His promises. True, judgement has come from time to time but that was still a fulfillment of God’s promises of judgement upon wickedness. Were the sacrifices and laws burdensome? Not if the people were faithful. They offered times of rest and gathering together in rejoicing. They offered the forgiveness of sins. And the following of God’s laws brought about great physical blessings for the people. Sometimes we may read through the book of Leviticus and think it must have been a burdensome life. But in reality, everything in those few chapters was spread out over at least whole year; and sometimes seven or fifty years. And many of them didn’t come into play unless serious sin was involved.

Following the LORD in faith at this time brought about physical blessing, a strong and close-knit community, and most importantly, fellowship with God. He wanted to be with His people; in the present life and forever.

When God asks a question, we need to keep in mind that He’s not asking because He needs the answer. His questions here and the demand for an answer have a sharp edge to them. But God’s ultimate goal is always to bring His people to Himself. God does not desire that any should perish. The hope would be that the people would think about these questions and come to realize that God has done them nothing but good and that they would turn back to Him.

To help the people remember, God lists a couple things He has done to them in the past. The things He brings up are designed to include everything that took place in between. God begins with bringing the people out of slavery to Egypt. Hopefully they would recognize that God put them in Egypt in the first place so that they could safely grow into the great nation that came out of there. Regardless, it was obviously God who brought them out of Egypt entirely by His own strength; at the same time, by the plagues, showing that He was more powerful than any of the Egyptian gods.

God is perfectly able to do anything He wants done by Himself. But often times, He works through His creation. Accordingly, when the Israelites left Egypt, He raised up Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to guide them. Through Moses, God gave the history of the world and the Law. This was a precious gift given only to the people of Israel. God spoke to Moses face to face, so there was never any question that Moses had the information right. He judged the people and settled disputes.

Perhaps most importantly, Moses interceded for the people to God. Moses was a foreshadowing of Jesus who was the greater prophet that Moses predicted. Jesus is the judge and prophet and even now is the One who intercedes on our behalf before the Father.

Aaron was the beginning of the priestly line and the first high priest. He primarily offered sacrifices on behalf of the people and he also interceded for them. He too is a foreshadowing of Christ. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice and offered Himself for us. Even though He is not of the line of Aaron, Jesus has become our perfect and permanent High Priest who brought His perfect sacrifice into the holiest of holies and the very presence of the Father.

While we don’t hear much about Miriam, we know that she was a prophetess and once the Israelites crossed the Red Sea she led the women in praising the Lord for the deliverance He provided. Judging from that, she most likely had a leading role in ministering to the women. As we read the New Testament, we see that there were several women who ministered to Jesus; but Jesus was willing to minister to women; not something done by the normal Rabbi of the time.

Right from the very beginning of their escape from Egypt, the Lord took care of the people: He provided leadership, food, water, and their clothing and sandals did not wear out the whole time. Next the LORD reminds them of the danger they were in right before they entered the Promised Land.

They were encamped beside the nation of Moab and the king of Moab at the time was named Balak. He greatly feared the Israelites because there were so many of them and they were right beside his nation. At the time, Israel was forbidden to harm the people of Moab, so they were in no danger; but Balak didn’t trust the situation. He sent for a prophet named Balaam who was known for both blessing and cursing people. Balak offered a lot of money to Balaam so that he would come and curse Israel.

But the LORD intervened. He made it very clear to Balaam that he was not to curse Israel. In fact, Yahweh put words of blessing in the mouth of Balaam so that he ended up blessing Israel in the name of the LORD three times and even prophesied the coming of Christ.

The LORD next reminds them of how they crossed the Jordan river, leaving the land of Shittim where Balaam was supposed to curse them and arriving in Gilgal which was in their Promised Land. God had gotten them where He had told them He would get them; once more fulfilling His promises. All of these things were righteous acts of God and they would have brought to mind all the other righteous acts He had accomplished besides these.

How much good has God done in your life? What all did God have to bring you through before you would accept Jesus as Saviour? Who has God placed in your life that was a help to you in any way? Remember that God brought you out of the land of slavery; until you came to Christ you were a slave to satan and sin and death. Certainly there are horrendous things that have happened to us and happened in our lives; but is God the cause of these things? Or is He the One who will help us through the difficulties of living in a fallen would. He has a Promised Land for us too. Trust Him to lead you there.

In verses 6 and 7, Micah answers as the people would answer; and I take it to be a rather smart-alec answer. The people of Israel, especially the rich, the governing, and the religious leaders, had continued to offer all the sacrifices that the law required. But they were offered with defiled hearts and unclean hands. These people regularly advanced themselves at the cost of the poor and powerless; their sacrifices were meaningless to God.

Their religious observances had become mechanical and simply something they did. They were not worshiping God; they were not bringing glory to the One who so deserved it; they were not offering thanks to the Father who had done so much for them. Each of us must be careful that we don’t fall into the same trap. With all the things that go on in our lives, it is easy to let our minds wander at the times we ought to be concentrating on God.

Try to come to church with a settled mind, focused on Christ and ready to worship Him. I know that’s hard, especially if you have to get children ready; but make the effort. Bible reading needs to be a time focused on the word and thinking about it. Don’t let it become something you do just to get it over with and move on to something else. Our celebration of the Lord’s Supper is so important. It is a special time of communion with Jesus and of spiritual nourishment. It is a celebration that needs to be partaken of often; but it is our own responsibility to make sure it doesn’t become a meaningless ritual.

So, the people are offering sacrifices which they think are sufficient. They are following the letter of the Law. They ask the Lord what He wants. The list they go through gets more valuable as they go along: yearling calves, thousands of rams, rivers of oil? Now they step into the absurd and ask if God wants them to sacrifice their firstborn children. You can see that they are in very dangerous territory.

God had continuously warned His people against worshiping Molech and Chemosh, specifically regarding the sacrificing of children. In Jeremiah 32:35 God says, “*They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.*”

The question that might come to mind is “What about Abraham and Isaac?” Obviously from the account, God never intended for Abraham to go through with it. It was a test for Abraham, and, more importantly, it was a demonstration of what would happen with God’s only begotten Son for our salvation: God Himself would provide the necessary and complete sacrifice. This was a one-time occurrence and will never be repeated.

Unfortunately, child sacrifice is a present reality for us. Yes, there are some satanic groups and those who practice witchcraft that sacrifice children (and adults). But our main problem now is abortion. Abortion is a sacrificial offering to an idol. We may not call it Chemosh or Molech, but the same spiritual forces of darkness are involved. We might call the current idols autonomy or selfishness or irresponsibility. These are idols that people worship; and they are willing to do so with the life of a child.

Keep in mind though, that abortion is not an unforgivable sin. We must treat those who have been involved with it with love and kindness. We must offer them the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the way out of the trap they are in. All the while we must not condone it.

God’s answer rings out in verse 8: He’s already told us. He has made it clear what He wants from His people. And they are not doing it. When we truly consider the law and the ceremonial sacrifices, we can see that God is a God of justice and kindness and that He wants His creation to be with Him in fellowship; but entirely on His terms. We don’t get to tell God how to go about things; it is our place to be submissive to Him. In the usual paradox of God’s Kingdom, it is in submitting to Him that we gain freedom and power.

The Jews made the mistake of believing that since they were the chosen people and had been entrusted with the law, that they had it made. They thought they could do as they wished and God would not punish them. They refused to listen to the prophets when they warned of God’s impending judgement. Then, they were bewildered when God’s judgement came upon them.

We who claim Christ as Saviour are in great danger of falling into that same trap. Our salvation comes strictly through faith in Jesus. There is nothing we can do to earn it. But if we don’t have a full understanding of what that means, we are in danger of taking that salvation for granted. We can excuse ourselves for a few sins here and there. We might tend to sit back and coast into heaven. But remember Jesus’ warning about those who say “Lord, Lord”; and Jesus tells them to depart, He never knew them.

We are still held to the same standard as Israel was with verse 8. We are to walk humbly with our God; the only difference for us is, we walk with Him in Christ. We submit to Christ and His commands; we submit to what God allows in our lives which means we seek His help while accepting what we are going through. Jesus is not only our Saviour but our Lord and King. We don’t get to back talk Kings or tell them how we think things ought to be done. We can make request; but then be satisfied with the answer.

A Christian is to “*do justice*” and “*love kindness*”. These don’t get us into heaven or make us right with God; but they demonstrate that we are walking humbly with Him. Notice that phrase “*do justice*”. That is actively performing what is just; that which is righteous in the Kingdom of God. But justice must be tempered by kindness. Think about how strong that is, to love kindness. This particular form of the word love indicates having strong affection for something. Kindness is an act we should enjoy performing and look forward to.

These are difficult, it can be hard to have the right balance. Praise God we are blessed with the Holy Spirit who helps us with these things. Our Lord God is good. When Jesus told us to love God and love our neighbor, He meant it. Try hard to keep these words in mind when living out your Christian life: Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

Prayer

All-powerful God, you have a case against each of us and against Your church if we were to face Your righteous judgement unaided. But You are merciful and kind and You have graciously sent Your only begotten Son to pay the penalty for the charges against us. By His work on the cross, Your justice is satisfied for all who cling to Him as Saviour. In Him, we have been declared “Not guilty”.

Thank You for making a way for us to have eternal life; to have our sin and guilt removed forever. It is as simple as accepting salvation in Jesus. But that acceptance brings a cost. We become Your servants to do with as You please. We will be called to suffer just as our Saviour was called to suffer. May it always be for Your glory.

Help us, Holy Spirit, to hunger and thirst for justice; grow in us the fruit of kindness; lead us to love the brethren. Make us more like Christ and shape us into the spiritual stones that will be useful for building the temple of God.

We ask Your favor in all these things in the name of Jesus

Amen