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Series: Doing Justice

Part 2: What Does God Want?

Text: Micah 6:8; Deuteronomy 10:12; Psalm 40:6-8

In the year 2000, the film *What Women Want*, starred Mel Gibson who has an accident which scrambles his brain. He comes out of it with the ability to hear women’s thoughts. Nineteen years later, Taraji P. Henson starred in a film with the same premise, from the opposite side, called, *What Men Want.*  Wouldn't it be fun to be able to get inside another’s head and know what that person is thinking? Currently, we have to guess and most of the time we’re wrong.

The assumption of the short book of Malachi is that Israel does *not* know what Yahweh wants. They have tried to read God’s mind and have failed. In several areas of life, God has had to give simple instruction to Israel so that they might align themselves with God’s plans and purposes for them. I picture them, as they are chatting, “What in the world does Yahweh want?”

In the previous sermon in this short series, I explored a text in Isaiah 1:17, in which God gives five staccato imperatives, five short commands. If one were seeking justice, one might align oneself with these five.

Likewise, in this text, God tells His people what He wants. Rather than hiding His hand and His will and leaving us to read His mind, God has *shown* us want He wants. We know some of what God does *not* want.

1. God does not want empty liturgical expressions or actions (v. 7; Isaiah 1:12-17; Psalm 40:6-8)
2. God does not want extreme sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10)

That’s a bit of the negative. What are the positives? What does God want?

**The passage for consideration begins with God defending himself, through Micah, against any accusation of silence or ambiguity or opacity. No, God has been *showing* His people what He wants.**

1. **Do justly**. I told you in the previous sermon in this series, that there was no definition of justice in the scriptures. God is just and we are called to bring about justice in our dealings with our colleagues. Whatever justice is, it is a set of actions that bring to our culture, the perspective of The Eternal. *Justice,* in a word, speaks of our social contract. It is the word that drives how we interact with other citizens on the planet. We are to *do* justly. In one short line, we have a call to action. Do. Yes, believe. Yes, have meetings. Yes, convene symposia and write papers on justice. In addition, says Micah 6:8, DO something!!! Without going to any corollary passages in other books of the bible, let’s see what this failure to act justly looked like. Cf. Malachi 2:1-2; 3:1-3, 5-7, 9-11
2. **Love mercy**. Hebrew word is *hesed*. Express generosity, loyalty, faithfulness, covenant obligation, graciousness. When working with a person who is weaker than we are, we are express the grace of God rather than bringing down a hammer. We are not to simply, *let* mercy. We are to *love* it. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught, *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy* (Matthew 5:7).

In a monologue by Portia in Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice, Act 4, Scene 1, Portia begs Shylock for mercy.

*The quality of mercy is not strained;*

*It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven*

*Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;*

*It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:*

*'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes*

*The throned monarch better than his crown:*

*His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,*

*The attribute to awe and majesty,*

*Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;*

*But mercy is above this sceptred sway;*

*It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,*

*It is an attribute to God himself;*

God is faithful to His people, who are not always faithful to God. However, those people are to note God’s *hesed* and imitate it in their dealings with each other.

1. **Walk humbly with your God.** These first two items are acts to which we give ourselves, that strengthen a certain societal contract. This third item, however, is a reminder that ultimately our ability to do justly is dependent upon our relationship with God. **Our walk affects our work**. A serious walk with God makes for a serious practitioner of justice. Several commentators have suggested that *walk humbly* is not the best understanding of the Hebrew wording of verse 8. The Hebrew word for humbly appears only here in the entire Old Testament. Other renderings of *walk humbly* are *walk carefully; walk thoughtfully; walk circumspectly.* Do you hear it? The ability to act justly is an organic consequence of a certain quality walk with God.

Let’s be cautious here. Neither God nor Micah are saying that the sacrificial system has no value. What God wants Israel to do is to put ritual in its proper place. The *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* has a good line in it: *Most scholars now admit that Micah was not attacking the sacrificial system itself,* ***but the conviction that external religious acts without inward piety cannot establish a right relationship with God.***

The reason this is so important is because justice work done without theological underpinnings is a failure to be the Church. The distinction we bring to any political discussion, engagement or action is that we bring, without apology, the God view. We walk with God. This God has made plain what God’s will is. It is plainly seen in this text. It is plainly seen in New testament texts such as Matthew 5:16:

*Let your light so shine before humanity, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

John Phillips offers an outline of these three movements in the text:

* Offer to God a life of transparent honesty- Do justly
* Offer God a life of tender humanity- Love mercy
* Offer God a life of true humility- Walk humbly with your God

This text in Micah gives to Israel, a way of living. It reminds me of a little-known text in 1 Samuel 12. Samuel is addressing Israel after they demanded a king. Samuel says, *...far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you;* ***but I will teach you the good and the right way*** (1 Samuel 12:23).

In this short text in Micah 6:8, we are shown the good and the right way.

**Closing**

We Americans love a good court scene. If it’s drawn out over weeks, that’s even better. Witness the millions who tuned in from January to October as OJ Simpson was tried in 1995, in a case presided over, by Judge Lance Ito.

Witness the attention given to the impeachment proceedings of President Donald J. Trump from December 2019 to February 2020. We like a good courtroom drama. What we don’t seem to want is a Righteous Judge who will tell us what He requires and desires from us. God, the Righteous Judge would pay the ultimate price for reconciling criminals to Himself. He would send His son to us.

He has shown you what is good!

Amen