

What Does the Lord Require of Us?

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Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. ² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. ³ “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! ⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. ⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.” ⁶ “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” 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? (Micah 6:1-8)

1. The Images of God

What images come to mind when you think of God in the Bible? What is your favorite image of God among the images? There are so many images of God in the Bible. God is the creator, the healer, the provider, the protector, the warrior, the father, the mother, the husband, the lover, the shepherd, the potter, the lawgiver, the instructor, the friend, the companion, the merciful one, the judge, the avenger, the king, the spirit, the guide, the word, the light, and the cloud. I am sure you can find more images of God. What is your favorite image of God? This morning, I would like to introduce one more image of God found in today's scripture. That is the image of the prosecutor.

2. The Prosecutor God

In Micah 6, God is taking the people to court. Why? It is because their behavior has been offensive. God wants to make a plea against them. God is the prosecutor and the Israelites are the defendants. Do you know who the jury is? The mountains and the hills are the jury. Why do you think the mountains and hills are the jury? It is because the mountains and the hills know what the Lord and what the people have done.

God asks His people, “***what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!***” (verse 3) God asks such questions because many of the people think that the Lord has wronged them. The Lord challenges the people to prove their complaints.

Numbers 11:4-6 says, **“the Israelites also wept again, and said, “If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”**

The Israelites focused on what they did not have. They missed the delicious Egyptian food they left behind. Yet they forget about the brutal whip of Egyptian slavery. The people do not remember what God did for them. In verse 4, the Lord says, **“I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.** God appointed Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead His people in the exodus and promised them a new land.

By choosing the episode of Balak and Balaam, Micah continues telling the Israelites what the Lord has done. God changes a curse of Balak, the king of Moab, to a blessing through Balaam.

Micah helps the people to remember what happened at Shittim and Gilgal. Shittim was the Israelites’ campsite east of the Jordan River before the people entered the promised land. Gilgal was the first camp on the west bank. These two places represent God’s loving care for the people. The two places refer to the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River and entrance into the promised land. In the days of Micah, the Israelites had forgotten what God had done and turned away from the Lord.

In response to the challenge of the Lord, the people ask, **“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”**

The people ask what God expects of them in light of their sins. The people wonder whether they can appease the Lord with sacrifices. The Israelites propose increasingly extravagant gifts, ending with child sacrifice. The willingness to sacrifice a child suggests seriousness. The people are willing to do anything. However, sacrifices and other religious rituals aren’t enough. God wants the people to live transformed lives.

3. Do Justice

Verse 8 says, **“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?”** People try all kinds of ways to please God. But God has made His wishes clear: He wants His people **“to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.”** What does “do justice” mean? The Message Bible translates, **“Do what is fair and just to your neighbor.”** Do

we do what is fair and just to our neighbor? In my first year in seminary, the new students attended several seminars on sexism, racism, classism, and ageism in America. U.S. laws prohibit any discrimination based on race, sex, social class, and age, but still, many people experience these kinds of discrimination.

What does the Bible say about discrimination? In Matthew 5:45, Jesus says, “***you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.***” Since God created everyone, God treats everyone without discrimination. God shows grace and care for all of his creatures and God wants us to love both neighbor and enemy.

4. Love Kindness (Mercy)

God wants His people not only to do justice to others, but also to love mercy. What is the difference between “do justice” and “love mercy”? Mercy is a higher character than justice. While to do justice means to treat everyone equally, mercy implies steadfast love, compassion, and forgiveness.

The term “mercy” is translated from “hesed” in Hebrew. In Hosea 2:19, we can sense the true meaning of the word. The Lord says to the Israelites, “***I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy.***” God acts like the husband of a divorced wife, Israel. Transgressions of Israel against God have been forgiven and forgotten. So “love mercy” means to forgive someone unconditionally as God did to Israel.

In the New Testament, the case of “love mercy” is found in John 8:1 and the following. When Jesus was in the temple courts, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They say “***In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?***” (verse 5) Jesus says to them, “***if any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her***” (verse 7).

John’s Gospel tells us that those who brought the woman to Jesus began to go away one at a time, until only Jesus was left with the woman. Jesus asks her, “***where are they? Has no one condemned you?***” “***Neither do I condemn you.***” “***Go your way and from now on do not sin again***” (verse 10 & 11). In this story, Jesus teaches us the importance of compassion and forgiveness instead of judging others because of their sins.

5. Walk Humbly with God

The first and second command, “do justice and love kindness” are about how to love our neighbor. The third command is related with how to love God: “***to walk humbly with the Lord.***” The term “to walk with God” means “to follow” the will of the Lord. While I was preparing my message, I realized that I quite often make judgments related to others. Like the Pharisees, I find myself critical

of others' behaviors or laziness. I become like the prosecutor in Micah 6. And I realize, unless I walk humbly with God, I can't do justice and love mercy in my relationship with others.

6. Conclusion

The core issue of today's scripture is the relationship between God and His people. God knows everything we have done or undone. He can be the prosecutor and indict us any time. Yet Micah does not want us to forget what God has done for us. Instead of indictment, God has continued forgiving and loving us. Micah also tells us that our offerings and religious rituals would not please God. He says what God really wants from His people is to live lives with genuine love for our neighbor and for God.

7. Application

These days we have at least two common concerns. One is the news about what is going on in Washington DC. The other is the future of the United Methodist Church. In these two cases, we notice that each one has a quite different view. Everyone seems to think that their view is right and the other's is wrong. If we focus on our denomination, each side believes that they are faithful to the teaching of the Bible and the others are not.

The problem I see is that everyone acts like the prosecutor or the judge. Each one seems to believe that God is on their side. The question is "how can we find unity and live together in harmony? Do you have any idea how to deal with our dilemma? My suggestion is that everyone gives up his or her views and asks God what to do. If we do that, I believe a miracle would happen. Listen what happened to Peter in the Acts of the Apostles.

In Acts 10:28, when Peter visits Cornelius, he says to the Gentiles in Cornelius' house, "***it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.*** ²⁹ ***So when I was sent for, I came without objection.*** According to Jewish tradition, Peter should not visit a Gentile. But his views on the Gentiles has changed when he had a vision regarding the unclean animals. When he said that he had never eaten the unclean animals, God said, "***Do not call anything impure that God has made clean***" (Acts 10:15). Peter humbly submitted to the revealed truth when he heard God's voice. Peter did not know but now learned that God loved not only the Jews but also the Gentiles.

What does God require of us? I believe that God would exhort us to walk humbly with the Lord by doing justice and loving mercy and by loving one another despite our differences. Then God would say that we can stay together and be a globally connected church and focus on making disciples and transforming the world for Christ. Amen.