

Natalie W. Bell
February 9, 2020

Having a Heart Like God's
Micah 6: 6-8

*"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 was God's prophet 700 years before the birth of Christ.
And yet, his mission and message are ***strikingly similar to that of Jesus!***
He held up a mirror to the people, about their relationship with God.
These were people living in a culture not unlike our own—
a culture of great religious diversity, and a time of unrest in the society.

And things were not all bad on the faith front.

The people of Israel were worshiping; giving was good.
But something was missing.
Things looked good on the outside, but inside things were bad.
The people said they loved God, but their actions didn't match.
They talked the talk, but they didn't walk the walk.

So in Micah 6, ***God puts together a prosecution*** against His own people,
acting as lawyer and judge;
and calling upon the mountains and hills as witnesses!
Listen to verses 1-4:
*Hear what the Lord says:
Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.....*

*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.*

Why does God put the people on trial?

Because these seemingly faithful people have been robbing the poor,
Taking bribes,
Not caring for the most vulnerable.
They are arrogant, and uncaring.
And—they have forgotten.

Forgotten the God who saved them, and rescued them from Egypt.
Their worship looks good on the ***outside***,
but inside they have forgotten who they are on the ***inside***,
and ***whose*** they are.

So God wants justice.

God wants them to share the love and justice that they have received!
And boy, do they complain!
What do you want God?
What more do you want of us?
More sacrifices? More money?

Listen to verses 6 and 7:

*"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?"*

And God's says, No, I don't want more.

Faith is not about worshipping a certain way,

Giving certain sacrifices,
 Talking the right talk,
 Or looking the part.
 Faithfulness is about living the right way.
 It's about justice, mercy, and humility.
 Walking the walk.

Micah says in 6:8:

*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?*

Do you think we need to hear those words today?

Could these words be **a wake-up call to all of us?**
 How many of us do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?
 How many of us struggle with talking the talk,
 but not always walking the walk?

And why is it so hard?

I wonder if it's because it involves something most of us resist---**surrender**.
 And---**obedience**, to God.
 It involves **giving up our 'freedom' to do whatever we want, right?**
 Which when you think about it,
 freedom to do whatever is actually not freedom---it gets you stuck—
 in the wrong choices, and wrong places.
 It definitely doesn't lead to real life.
 It often leads to hurt, brokenness, pain, or trouble.

Real life is about **surrendering that 'freedom' to do what we please**,
 And obeying what God requires.

But why the word "Requires"?

Doesn't that sound like God is trying to take away our freedom?
 Is that true?
 Isn't following God,
 the way to real life, peace, and joy?
 Just like loving God and neighbor is the way to life and joy.

There's a reason Jesus called loving God and neighbor the Great commandments.

There's a reason we call it the Golden Rule.

Because living the way God requires, brings life, now and forever.

The truth is, when ***we surrender*** our lives to God,

By obeying God--

That's when we ***find real life***.

Jesus did this.

He didn't just talk about bringing people new and abundant life—he actually did it.

And ***how did he do it?***

By surrendering his life to God.

By giving up his freedom to be God,

And becoming an obedient person, a servant.

Don't we see Jesus in ***each of these requirements?***

To do justice.

Jesus helped people on the outside, people in need, the least of these.

He worked to restore and bring wholeness.

And, he came to save not just a few, but the whole world!

To love kindness, or mercy.

The word here in Hebrew is a very important word—hesed.

It means loving-kindness, and it's the word used for God's love for us.

Jesus loved in this unconditional, sacrificial way,

and asked his followers to do the same.

Last week we talked about ***getting our love tank filled with God's love***, so that we can share love with others.

That's what Jesus did.

He was filled with God's love, so he could show that love in all his Words and actions.

And what about walking humbly with God?

Isn't that a perfect description of Jesus' life?

Philippians 2 says it so well:

² *make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* ³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in **humility regard others as better** than yourselves.* ⁴ *Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.* ⁵ *Let the same mind be in you that was^a in Christ Jesus,*
⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God,*
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ *but **emptied himself**,*
*taking the **form of a slave**,*
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ *he **humbled himself***
*and **became obedient** to the point of death—*
even death on a cross.

Justice, loving-kindness, and humility.

These are the keys to real life, joyful life,

For us as people of God, and for us as the body of Christ.

These words describe Jesus—and hopefully, us!

Justice, loving kindness, and humility.

Walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

Easier said than done, right?

And yet, we do see examples of this.

Did you hear the story of ***Pete Kasden of Toledo, Ohio?***

He gave 3 million dollars of college scholarship money to underprivileged high school seniors, AND a member of their family, to attend college completely free—tuition, room, board, books, and fees.

But you know what was even more amazing?

He gave the money, NOT as a gift, or charity.

He said he did it because it was his ***responsibility***.

In fact, when he announced the scholarships at a school assembly,

he told them to NOT refer to the money as a gift, but as a ***responsibility***.

He said that he knew his success as a white businessman from a privileged family was not him being a self-made man.

He said: *"The competitive set, the people I compete with, were a lot smaller than otherwise could be if everyone got the same level of education. And Martin Luther King always said history has a long and sordid path of people and groups with privilege protecting their privilege. Well, I'm done protecting my privilege."*

Pete believes it is **his responsibility** to help others attend college, And he believes it is the responsibility of everyone who had a good education to do the same. He's started a foundation in Toledo for this, and he hopes this sparks similar programs across the country!

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/free-college-tuition-scott-high-school-pete-kadens-toledo-ohio-students-responsibility/>

I was thinking about Owasso as I read Micah this week.

We live in a city of over 50,000 people, **and over 75 churches!**

According to our city leaders, we are a city of faith.

We have little crime, little poverty, and few of the problems that plague big cities like Tulsa....or is that just talk?

Do you remember a few years ago,
when **a homeless man was** living outside this back door,
between the church and the shed?

It was when the Café was open, so I left him tokens to get free meals,
a blanket and some other necessities...but he moved on to another place,
probably right here in Owasso.

Most of you never knew that a former person in this family of faith was
imprisoned, just for unpaid parking tickets.

How was this person supposed to pay parking tickets on a tiny salary,
while in jail? Do we think about people being in **debtor's prisons?**

If you pay attention to the Owasso **Walmart parking lot**,
you can see that people do live in cars there....
the police try to move them along,

but there are people who have nowhere else to go.

We've had multiple people over the past 16 years come by the church and ask
me if they could just **rest or sleep in their car**, in our parking lot.

We've helped dozens of families on the **edge of eviction**,
With rent assistance.

And when the ***OpenTable Community Café*** was open,
We discovered there are a lot of hungry people in Owasso!
Who knew?

Mark can tell you that right here in this awesome city
there was a great need for ***a Margaret Hudson program*** for about 50 teen
moms, around 20 years ago—
until the City decided this City didn't have 'those kind of girls'.
Today they have to ride a bus into North Tulsa for that program.

We may ***look great on the outside*** as a city,
but inside we are just like any other city.
We have crime, we have poverty,
we have homelessness, and unemployment, hunger, and teenage moms.
And sadly, in a City that is so ultra-religious and Christian,
we have lots and lots of domestic violence.

People are hurting, and in need.
What are we going to do about that?
How are we called to do justice—right here in our community?

Proverbs 31:8-9 says this:

*Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.*^[b]

⁹ *Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

That means something more than just writing a check.

It means visiting prisoners, serving hungry people.
Speaking up for those who are hurting and struggling,
And working to change systems that are unfair to the poor and needy.

What does it mean to love kindness?

I have been reading a great book by Adam Hamilton called ***The Walk***.
He is a Methodist pastor in Kansas City
who has written some great books we've studied here.

In his book he talks about looking at your hand,
kind of like we did last week when we looked at our ***five fingers***

to think about the five love languages—
words, service, gifts, time, and touch.

He suggests that when it comes to serving,
we take those five fingers and challenge ourselves

to do five acts of kindness a week!

Isn't that a great, and simple idea for living out our faith?

It doesn't matter what your love language—

everyone can do five kind things a week—

whether it's through words, time, touch, gifts, or service!

I heard a great Ted Talk podcast last week,

about a Holocaust survivor named **Werner Reich**.

Werner was a child when his family fled Germany.

and they hid for a few years with a family hiding fellow Jews,

until he was arrested at age 15.

He was shipped in a cattle car for three days to a concentration camp, then
another, being used for slave labor because of his age and strength.

He saw family and friends perish in the gas chambers.

He survived when thousands did not.

He lived through a death march of three days in the winter,

It started with 60,000 people, and 15,000 died on the way.

He was shipped to a camp in Austria, where he slept for 3 days next to a dead
man, just so he could eat his rations and survive.

In Aushwitz, he shared a small, filthy top bunk bed with two other men.

One was a man named Herbert Levine, a Jewish professional magician,
who had survived by entertaining Nazi officials.

One day he brought Werner a deck of cards; and showed him a card trick.

Then he did what no magician does, he explained how to do it.

That little act of kindness stayed with Werner forever.

It inspired him to not only speak out about the Holocaust after the war,
it helped give him the hope he needed to survive.

He continually waited for the day when he could have his own deck of cards,
and do the card trick on his own. He says in the podcast, you never know what
an act of kindness will do for someone else. *"If you ever know somebody who
needs help, who is scared, be kind to them. Give them some advice, a hug, a card
trick...it will be hope for them, and may stay with them...forever."*

From the Ted Talk podcast, January 27, 2020.

Do Justice. Love Kindness.

And finally--Walk Humbly with God.

In other words, do what Jesus would do—
Love God, and your neighbor as yourself.

Can't we all find ways to do these things?

Sometimes the ***smallest acts*** mean the most to other people.

Other times, we are called to give in ***big, sacrificial ways***.

But whether big or small, we can all do what Micah says God requires!

That is the Good News of the Gospel today:

We've been told what the Lord requires of us, and what is good:

To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Now may seek God's help, to do just that.

For this, all God's people say, Amen.